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JUNE, 1968

VOL. 23, NO. 1

**NEW COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH
 MYSTERY NOVEL**

**THE
 MAN OF A MILLION
 FACES**

by **ROBERT HART DAVIS**

Tortured, alone, a girl faced a dozen witnesses whose mistaken testimony could send her to the chair. While a hostile city waited to learn her fate, she gambled everything on one last chance. There was one final game to play. The Man of a Million Faces smiled. He was ready.

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THE EDITORS

THE MAN OF A MILLION FACES

Tortured, alone, a girl waited in jail to learn her fate—she who had not killed the man she loved, although six witnesses swore that she had! There was one last chance, one last desperate game to play. The Man of a Million Faces smiled. He was ready . . .

*By the famous author who wrote more than
30 MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. full length novels*

ROBERT HART DAVIS

THE ELEGANT twin glass-and-steel towers of The Mayfair Towers Apartments reach into the evening sky of the plush East Seventies of Manhattan. The rich and fashionable live in The Mayfair, and the modern lobby glitters with chrome, statuary, and as many paintings as an art gallery.

At exactly six o'clock on a Wednesday evening, a couple in evening clothes left the elevator and started across the shining expanse of the lobby. They were a brilliant pair. The man, dressed in an impeccable dinner jacket, was in his mid-thirties, handsome, immaculate, and with strong features. He looked very much the rising ex-

ecutive, except for a certain vagueness in his eyes which no one would have noticed without looking closely.

The woman with him was wearing sable, full-length, but no one would have noticed that either. Not when they looked at her. She was tall, curved full. She had long, red shining hair, and a face that couldn't have launched a single ship because every man working the launching would have been looking at her. That was why none of the six people in the lobby at the time noticed the other woman enter from the street.

When they left the elevator, the couple, steered by the gorgeous

redhead who was holding the man's arm as if she was afraid he would fly away, levitated across the lobby, looking straight ahead. Walking was too mundane a term for the way they moved, floating out in all their glory for an evening of obvious pleasure.

They did not float far. It was the handsome man who suddenly stopped in the middle of the plush lobby and stared at the other woman who advanced from the door toward them. His grey eyes seemed to blink, the six witnesses said later, and then he brushed at the eyes as if he could not quite believe what he was seeing. He went pale, according to the same six witnesses, and according to the redhead holding his arm.

Pale or not, he stared straight at the other woman coming toward him. This was when the six witnesses first really noticed the other woman. None of them had any trouble describing her. She was not a woman you would forget any more than you would have forgotten the shattering redhead.

She was small and dark-haired, the second woman, but in every other way was elegant as the redhead. She was well-dressed in a green tweed suit and rakish green hat, well-groomed, and her face would have been even prettier than the face of the redhead—except for one fact. A long, ugly scar ran from the corner of her left eye all the way to the point of her chin,

and both her left eye and the corner of her mouth were drawn down.

The ugly scar and left side of her face turned what would have been beauty into something no one could forget. The six witnesses remembered that face; they couldn't forget it after what happened next.

The small, scarred woman, wild-eyed and obviously distraught, walked straight toward the elegant couple who stood as if rooted to the marble floor of the lobby. She pulled a large, .45 caliber automatic from her purse without breaking stride. The redhead screamed.

The man raised his hands toward the scarred women. "No! Carla, no!" he cried.

The scarred woman dropped her handbag, held the big gun in both hands, and at five feet began to shoot.

The man was lifted and flung backwards by the force of the first bullet. The redhead fainted dead away. All the witnesses started to scream. On the floor the handsome man moved. The scarred woman stood over him and fired six more shots straight down into his chest and head until his face was almost a pulp.

When the man no longer moved at all, the scarred woman stared down at him. Then she turned, the automatic still in her hands, and walked straight back out of the lobby and into the street.



Only then did the six terrified witnesses begin to move.

II

DR. SAMUEL SEARS considered his face in his mirror as he shaved. He was relieved to see that there were no signs of his long, if highly enjoyable, activities of the night before. He held his hands out straight before him, and found the long, slender, but steel-strong fingers perfectly steady. Satisfied, he completed his shaving.

A small smile played at the corners of Sears' mouth as he recalled the night just past. He had not intended to indulge Janet Mosher's interest in him, since he had surgery this Thursday afternoon, but the lady was both desirable and not to be denied, and what was life for if not to accept the exciting moments that came your way?

Anyway, as proved by his steady hand and clear eyes this morning, Sears knew exactly how much sleep he could lose. He was fully aware of his recuperative powers, amazing for a man well past his youth who had not lived a hermit's life, and used them to the limit but never an inch beyond.

His shaving completed, Sears brushed his fine light brown hair, straightened his tie and went out into his bachelor bedroom. He donned a light grey flannel lounge suit of expensive cut, glanced only once into a full length mirror to be

sure all was correct, and went out to his breakfast.

He would not think again this day of how he might look. He had learned long ago from his banker father, and then during his medical studies in Paris, that a man made sure he looked his best and then forgot about his appearance.

Kim Ree, his Korean chef, valet and general *major domo*, served eggs *bercy* in the breakfast nook at the window. The view over the city from the high, plush apartment in The Carlton Towers was magnificent in the late spring morning. Sears liked to gaze out at the great city where he had been born and lived most of his life. He never tired of its sprawling grandeur, its complex power of good and evil, where each minute of the day millions of people followed the labyrinth of their lives. Far below him, Park Avenue was already a mass of traffic, and Sears found himself wondering once again about the lives of the people down there in the massed cars, taxis, busses and trucks.

His moment of thought was not to last. It never did. Kim Ree never let it. The small, solid Korean was the exception to the inscrutable Oriental. Silence challenged the voluble Kim. In all the years since Sears had found his valet—a tough sergeant in the R.O.K. Army at the time who attached himself to Lt. Colonel Sears of the Army Medical Corps in Korea—Kim had

never been at a loss for conversation.

"Big night, Chief?" Kim said.

"A good night, Kim," Sears grinned.

"Tsk, tsk," Kim clucked. "An important man like you, great plastic surgeon, scientist, playing footsie."

"Call it scientific curiosity," Sears laughed.

"I call it trouble. One of them'll catch you yet."

"Don't scare me," Sears said in mock horror.

"Pfoo!" Kim snorted, grinning.

"She called already. Twice. So did Alicia Farr and Mrs. Andres. Watch that one. Divorcees are poison, Chief."

"Thanks for the tip," Sears said drily, eating his eggs.

"No charge. What you going to do about them? They'll be calling back."

"I'll talk to them all later," Sears said. "Anything else on your mind?"

"Sure," the voluble valet said. "Dr. Dugardi in Rome wants you to fly over for consultation on the fifteenth."

"Tell him I will."

"And the Society of Cosmetic Surgery wants you to address their convention in Miami Beach."

Sears scowled. "Those frauds? How the devil did they get my private number?"

"You can get anything for a price, Chief," Kim said.

Sears stared out the window in anger. A change came over his handsome face. For a moment it seemed older, grimmer. Sears was thinking if the frauds who called themselves the Society of Cosmetic Surgery might not be a job for Mr. Jones, the famous and mysterious "Man Of A Million Faces."

It was not an idle thought—for Samuel Sears was, himself, the unknown Mr. Jones. It was the name he had adopted years ago when he first embarked on his secret life as the private dispenser of justice to hidden criminals no police force could touch. He had worked since the beginning of his dangerous private crusade with Commissioner Pinto, and it was the commissioner himself who had remarked, only half in jest, that the unknown Mr. Jones was "a man of a million faces," so skilled was Sears in disguise.

Sears was still thinking about exposing the frauds of the Cosmetic Surgery Society when he left his apartment. His cool blue eyes were as hard as sapphires.

III

DR. SAM SEARS walked down to Hippocratic House, the private hospital where he had his offices. He strode out in the brisk spring morning: a deceptively slender man with shoulders a lot broader than they seemed. A shade under six feet tall, Sears, who weighed a

surprising 190 pounds, could appear taller or shorter almost at will. That, and his ability to control the muscles of his face, had stood him in good stead in his days as an OSS man in Korea after being quietly transferred from the Medical Corps.

At Hippocratic House Sears rode up to his floor and walked into his office through his private entrance. Once in his quiet office he sat down to consider his operation scheduled for this day. He liked to think out his delicate plastic surgery for some time before he began to actually plan. Since beginning his work as Mr. Jones, he had curtailed his surgery, and liked to be sure of each special job when he did it now.

He planned carefully, oblivious to the many framed documents on his walls that went a long way toward describing the life of Dr. Samuel Sears—at least the public part. There was a boyishly framed diploma from the Benham School for Boys on Madison Avenue, and a colorful picture of the young and healthy-looking Rugby team of St. Swithin's Prep in Massachusetts, with wing-three-quarter Sears, S., beaming in front. An A.B. diploma from Yale, a sheepskin from Harvard Medical School, and two ornate Latin documents from The Sorbonne and Vienna, completed the data.

His residency at New York Medical Center was attested to in

the outer office—he had grown tired of hanging diplomas when he came to that one, and his assistant, Miss Agatha Bridge, had hung that one outside. The medals and papers of his military service were locked away and forgotten in a bottom drawer.

The only reference ever made now to his military exploits was when the devious Kim called him 'Colonel' to impress some new lady the Korean thought Sears should get closer to.

After ten minutes, Sears' eyes suddenly returned to the office from his contemplation, and he reached briskly for his intercom.

"Good morning, Miss Bridge. I'm ready now."

An instant later the door from the outer office and waiting room opened and Miss Agatha Bridge, R.N., advanced into the room. An imposing woman of fifty, Agatha Bridge ran the office like a chief petty officer. She had been less successful in running Sears, whom she considered a great man if he would just get down exclusively to work, but she had never given up.

"Good morning, Samuel. I trust you rested well last night?"

"To bed with a glass of milk at nine, Agatha," Sears grinned,

"Hah!" Agatha Bridge said. "The mail is ready, I've screened it, and Mr. Forbes is due for examination at eleven."

"Fine. Now—"

"And Miss Van Buren is here."

Sears was surprised. "Already? She wasn't due until noon."

Miss Bridge softened. "I expect she's nervous, Samuel. After all, it's an ordeal, you know."

Sears nodded. "All right, let her come in."

Agatha Bridge left. When the door opened again, it admitted a small woman who was obviously nervous. She smiled at Sears shakily. She was dark-haired, wore a green tweed suit and a rakish green hat, and would have been pretty except for a long scar on the left side of her face that drew down her left eye and the left corner of her mouth.



DR. SAMUEL SEARS

IV

DOCTOR SEARS smiled reassuringly. "Sit down, Carla."

Carla Van Beuren sat on the edge of the straight chair across the desk from Sears. She pressed her knees close together, and held her bag on her lap. She looked like a wild bird waiting for her cage to be opened.

"Nervous?" Sears said.

"Yes," Carla said. "But not frightened. No, frightened, too. Are all your patients frightened?"

"Many of them. It's not of the operation."

"No," Carla said, "it's after, the result. Will I be any better? Will I be beautiful? Will I, perhaps, be uglier."

"You're already beautiful, Car-

la," Sears assured her gently. "Your beauty has been covered, we'll simply uncover it. Right?"

"Yes," she said, and, "you're sure? I mean, tell me."

"I'm sure, Carla," Sears said. "I never operate, or promise, unless I'm sure. That's why I study a case so long. I've told you we'll get excellent results. The scar will be almost gone and your face will be normal. You'll look a bit different, of course. That you must expect."

Carla Van Beuren tried a smile. "Will my friends know me?"

"Your close friends will. But they may not even recognize you at once," Sears said. "Now there's nothing you have to know about

the operation. I'll admit you at noon, you'll be prepped for the operation, and after that you have nothing to worry about. A few days rest, two weeks in the hospital here, and then you can go anywhere you like."

"I think I'll go a long way," Carla Van Beuren said, smiling.

"Good," Sears said. "Now did you have a good night's sleep? Mental attitude is all-important in plastic surgery."

"I went to bed early, but I'm afraid I didn't sleep much," Carla said. "Mr. Dane was kind enough to give me the whole afternoon off, even with the trouble over the new contract. So I packed my bag at home, took that boat around Manhattan, and went to my girlfriend Aurora's apartment. Aurora was in Boston, and she'd suggested that I spend the night."

"To be alone? Away from your parents?" Sears asked.

Carla nodded. "I wanted to think. My parents tend to be a bit dramatic. They don't know what I'm doing, not yet, but I know they sensed my tension. It seemed like a good idea to just be alone and quiet. I didn't even watch television."

"You didn't want to be with your Mr. Morris?"

Carla Van Beuren stiffened. "No! George was the last person I wanted to see. He doesn't even know! I—I don't want him to think I'm doing it for him. He—he would

think I never believed he loved me as I am—ugly."

Sears' eyes became steady and hard. "You are not ugly, Carla. Not now, and not afterwards. Remember that."

She nodded. "All right, but I won't tell George, or see George, until I know exactly what and who I am."

"What did you tell Mr. Morris?"

"What I told everyone except Mr. Dane and my parents, that I was going on a trip for a few weeks."

Sears frowned. "I'm not sure that that was wise, Carla. You'll need visitors, comfort, friends while you recover here in the . . ."

Sears stopped. The top-sergeant voice of Agatha Bridge was booming outside in powerful protest. Sears listened. Agatha seemed to be having some trouble with someone who wanted to come into the private office . . . "told you the doctor is with a patient, and you can't go in! I don't care—"

The intercom on his desk buzzed angrily. He flipped it up.

"Yes, Agatha?"

"Captain Brian is here, Doctor. He insists—"

"Send him in, Agatha. It's all right."

The door opened and a small, stocky man in an old grey suit came in. He wore a battered felt hat, and his hair was grey. Agatha Bridge towered behind the new-

comer, and two other men slipped discreetly into the office behind him.

"Hello, Brian. What can I—" Sears began.

The small man glanced at Sears once from cool, pale blue eyes, then stepped toward Carla Van Beuren.

"Carla Van Beuren?"

The girl nodded. "Yes. Who are you?"

"Captain Brian of the commissioner's squad, Miss Van Beuren," the small man said quietly. "I have a warrant for your arrest. It's my duty to inform you that you don't have to answer any questions. You have the right to have an attorney, and—"

Carla Van Beuren blinked, stared. "Arrest? Me? Why—"

Sears jumped around his desk with a sudden catlike motion. Without appearing to move at all, he was suddenly between Captain Murry Brian and the girl. His hard eyes locked with those of Murry Brian. Anger edged his voice.

"You can't do this Murry! You hear me?"

"No," Captain Brian said.

"This is my office, Murry. We've been friends too long—"

"I've got a warrant, Sam."

"Damn it, can't it wait? This girl is about to undergo surgery!"

Brian glanced at Carla Van Beuren. "Your kind of surgery?"

"Of course."

"Then maybe I got here just in time."

Sears watched the small detective captain who had been his friend for so many years. "You're suggesting Miss Van Beuren might have a criminal reason for wanting a new face? That's ridiculous, Murry! I know Miss Van Beuren."

"Not so ridiculous, Sam," Brian said quietly.

Sears was silent. Carla Van Beuren sat as if she could not understand anything that was happening. Agatha Bridge and the other two detectives stood in the doorway now, silent. Sears was the first to break the silence.

"What is the charge, Murry?"

"Murder, Sam. Suspicion of Murder One."

V

CARLA VAN BEUREN'S voice echoed through the office:

"But I haven't killed anyone! Who have I killed?!"

Sears touched the girl's shoulder, his fingers hard, holding her. "Who do you say she killed, Murry?"

"I don't say she killed anyone," Brian said, "but witnesses say she killed a man named George Morris. Last night . . ."

Sears swore savagely and turned to Carla Van Beuren. The ugly scar stood out fiery red on the girl's white face.

"Carla," Sears began.

"George—dead. No!" the girl

said, faltered, and collapsed into a dead faint, held up by the grip of Sears' hands.

Captain Brian nodded to his men, who came and took the limp girl from Sears and carried her into the next room, where Sears had his examination table. Agatha Bridge scattered them with a sweep of her hands and went to work over the prostrate form of the girl, now lying on the table.

Sears lighted a cigarette. "Nice work, Murry. Did you expect to shock a confession out of her?"

Murry Brian sat down and crossed his bantam-rooster legs. He looked up at Sears from under his eyelids. "You asked me, I told you. She pulled a nice faint, if it's real."

"It's real," Sears said.

"You're the doctor, Sam."

"She's a nice girl, Murry. She's had a hard life with that face, and she was about to take a big, frightening step. She's on the edge anyway, and then you slug her with a sneak punch."

Brian rubbed at his sharp chin. "On the edge, eh? Ready to crack-up, maybe, Sam? Maybe she put everything she wanted into this operation, big dreams and all, and then he pulled the rug out even before she could take the big step?"

"Why don't you just tell me what happened first?" Sears said. "Or are you figuring me into damning admissions?"

Brian grinned. "Okay, Sam.

Morris was shot at six o'clock last night in the lobby of his apartment house. He was with a girl named Dolores Steed. She, and six other witnesses, all described Carla Van Beuren as the killer. The doorman knew her." And Brian went on to give Sears the full details of the shooting.

"What was Carla wearing?"

"The same as now, with a few small changes," Brian said. "We've been looking for her since about seven last night. Her parents didn't know where she was. Neither did anyone else we could find."

Sears said, "She stayed at the apartment of a friend. That's probably why she's wearing the same clothes. How did you find out she was here?"

"Her boss, Maxwell Dane," Brian said. The detective looked at Sears. "Tell me about Miss Van Beuren, Sam. Who she is, her mental condition, all that."

Sears shrugged. "She's not a killer, I can tell you that."

"Most killers aren't killers—except once. But maybe you're right. I don't know. Tell me about her."

"She's a smart, efficient girl who had a bad break," Sears said. "She's executive secretary to Maxwell Dane of Dane Electronics, as you already know. They're in a lot of government work. She lives at home with her parents. Except for her face she's a normal girl, gay and lively and bright.

"She hasn't had a lot to do with

men because of her face. About a year ago she met and fell in love with George Morris. He's Maxwell Dane's sales vice-president, handsome, with a big future."

"No more, Sam," Brian said. "Morris doesn't have a future."

"This operation on her face has been planned for months," Sears went on steadily. "She had every reason to expect it to be a success. Why would she kill Morris now?"

"You tell me," Brian said. "Was she worried about Morris? Was that what made her decide on the operation now?"

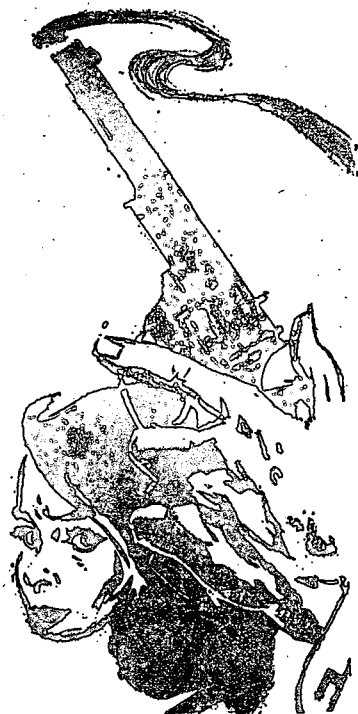
Sears thought; then said, "Possibly she was worried about losing him. She hadn't told him about the operation."

"She hadn't told anyone except Dane, and from the sound of him I'd say he'd cover for her. The operation right now is mighty convenient."

"You're saying maybe she wanted to change her appearance? Ridiculous. She had to be here for two weeks."

"Maybe she didn't intend to stay around, Sam. Maybe she figured on running out as soon as she could walk, bandages and all, and hide out until she took them off. Maybe even you wouldn't have recognized her by then. How soon could she have walked, Sam?"

"A few hours," Sears said reluctantly. "It's mostly local anesthesia, no shock. But that's almost



twenty-four hours after she's supposed to have killed him."

"So she had to take some risk."

"Damn it, Murry, it would have been stupid. She could have waited to kill him this afternoon if she was going to do it so openly. If she kills him just before she comes in here, her chances of getting away are a hell of a lot better. And why go out and kill him so openly—with her face!"

Brian sighed. "Okay, you've got a point. It doesn't sound much like good planning, I'll grant you. So it

was a crack-up killing. You admit she was edgy. She flipped and shot him down, probably because she thought she'd found out he was ditching her. Dolores Steed, the girl he was with, says he was her boy friend. She's something of a redhead."

"Carla cracked up, shot her boy friend in front of seven witnesses, and then walked in here the next morning?" Sears said. "Let me tell you one thing, Murry, if there's anything Carla Van Beuren is aware of it's her face. Do you think she'd forget how easy she is to describe and remember?"

"All right," Brian said, "she had a blackout. The shock. You've seen it, Sam; you're a doctor. It's just what might have happened under the circumstances. I believe I'm right!"

Sears scratched at the back of his left hand. He had to admit, medically, that Murry Brian could be right. From Brian's description of the crime—sudden, violent, crazed—it had all the signs of a sudden insanity. And such an insanity, such a shock in its violent result, could easily cause a complete block of memory. The powerful psychic desire to forget, the absolute necessity to forget or be torn apart.

"If she did it," Sears said slowly, "under the conditions, she would almost have to forget or go insane. The mind and body react to protect themselves."

"Yes," Brian said, "that's what I thought."

And yet, somehow, Sears could not believe it. He watched Agatha Bridge reviving Carla Van Beuren in the examination room, and her symptoms were not right. He watched Brian and his men take the girl away, a bewildered girl.

It was possible that she had killed Morris and then blocked it all out as if it had never happened. But . . . It was too simple, Carla's face made her too recognizable. What better way to flaunt your guilt than to have six witnesses see a face they could not possibly forget?

Alone in his office, Sears scanned the impressive diplomas on his wall. He did not see them. He was planning. Whether Carla Van Beuren was guilty or the victim of some clever trick, he wanted to help the girl, to be sure.

At the moment it was impossible for the police to do anything but believe her guilty, and work to prove it. Yet time was all on the side of the real killer, if it were a trick.

One way or the other, it looked like a job for Mr. Jones.

The suite below that of Dr. Samuel Sears in The Carleton Towers Hotel was rented, year round, by wealthy Reginald Trott, and used only on the rare occasions when young Trott came to New York from his estate in Trinidad. Except that the young millionaire

was an eccentric, and presented keys to almost any friend who chanced to be visiting New York. So the hotel personnel were not surprised at seeing almost anyone emerge from the suite.

In actuality, Reggy Trott had rented the suite on instructions from his friend Samuel Sears, and it was the plastic surgeon from the floor above who actually used the suite. Or, to be accurate, it was the other half of the dangerous double life of Samuel Sears who used the suite—Mr. Jones, The Man Of A Million Faces.

Now, Sears stepped into the locked closet of his own suite, and hurried down the spiral staircase to the floor below. He came out into his small, modern laboratory. His mind was busy with his problem—who should Mr. Jones be in this case of Carla Van Beuren?

It was his skill at disguise, learned from his medical work, and his OSS training, that had started the socialite surgeon on his second career. When his friend, Police Commissioner Angelo Pinto, had bitterly raged against a high-and-mighty criminal the police could not touch, Sears had instantly realized something he had wanted to do for many years—catch and punish the hidden criminals who walked free and above the law.

He had caught that particular high-and-mighty culprit, and another, and Mr. Jones was born.

Sears had never regretted his second life: the disguises pleased him, the acting challenged his mind, and the pursuit excited him. He was forced to admit that he had always wanted to be a detective, even in secret.

Now, as he sat and studied the life-size bust of his own face that he ironically had dubbed Mr. Jones, he considered the people in the case, the circumstances, and the possible motives. He studied his special wardrobe of disguises.

After a time he stood up and made a call to Washington, D.C. on a private line. He spoke to his secret contact high in the government for some time. When he hung up he went to his files and selected a set of identity papers.

Then, smiling, he went to work on his mobile face.

He had the identity he would assume and all the vital information needed for that identity. Mr. Jones was ready.

VI

MAXWELL DANE paced the forward deck of his forty-foot cabin cruiser. Dane was agitated, and even the cruiser, anchored just offshore at Red Bank, could not calm him today. The contract trouble was bad enough. The loss of George Morris was trouble enough. Now there was Carla.

"Where the devil is Magruder!" Dane said aloud.

The big businessman-scientist glanced toward the stern to see if anyone had noticed him talking to himself. No one had. He could see the slim body of his wife encased in skin-tight white sharkskin and broiling languidly in the spring sun. Dane wondered idly if all self-made rich men like himself had to have blonde bathing beauties for wives?

He also wondered if the blonde wives had to have useless young men like Wade Rogers in constant attendance? He supposed they did, not because their marriages weren't good enough, but because they had to be constantly reminded of what they could have married if they hadn't chosen to be safe and pampered. It was one thing to marry an older man; it was another to feel, even a little bit, that you had had to.

Dane was still thinking about his wife, Phyllis, and watching Wade Rogers hovering over her, when he was jerked out of his reverie by the movement of a small boat from shore. Dane went to the lee rail and shaded his eyes. Magruder?

It wasn't Jasper Magruder. Dane saw a stocky man of average height in the back of the small boat that approached the cruiser. The man had a thick nose, full lips, greying black hair in the sun, and a strong, jutting jaw.

As the man climbed aboard, Dane saw that the man's eyes were cold and wary, and that the man was taller than he seemed in his

somewhat shabby brown suit. Dane went to meet the newcomer.

"Mr. Maxwell Dane?" the man said.

"Yes," Dane said.

"Walt Jefferson, Mr. Dane, secret service," the man said quietly, and the disguised Sears showed his perfect credentials.

Dane glanced toward, where his wife and Wade Rogers were laughing in the sun, drinks in their hands although it was not yet three o'clock. "Come forward."

On the forward deck Dane turned to the stranger. "Secret service? I don't think I understand."

"Your sales vice-president is killed, your executive secretary is accused of the murder, and you don't understand why I'm here?" Jefferson/Sears said.

Dane nodded. "I see. But I don't see what it has to do with our government work, and I don't believe Carla killed Morris!"

"Neither do I, Mr. Dane," the man who called himself Jefferson said. "That's exactly why I'm here. If Miss Van Beuren didn't kill Morris, who did and why? You understand?"

"You think it might be connected to our work?"

"That's what I'm going to find out. Particularly the new contract."

"You know about the contract?"

Sears told what his Washington man had told him. "A new detonator for making bombs so small a man can carry them in his watch

pocket. I know that you're competing for the contract with Carson Controls, Inc. I know that Alexander Norman, the right-wing millionaire, has been putting pressure on you to sell your company to him."

Dane was silent. Then, "You know a great deal. I had no idea that much was divulged."

"It wasn't," Sears said. "Until this morning. Someone killed your Mr. Morris, Dane, and we have to know why, what they wanted, what will happen."

Dane nodded, stared out to sea. "I'll tell you what I can."

"First tell me about Morris and the Van Beuren girl."

"What do you want to know?"

"Were they in love?"

Dane watched the sea. "She was. I don't think he was. George Morris was a bright, handsome, shrewd, clever young man. Sure, he liked Carla; except for her face she's quite a girl all the way, but George—well, he was something of a swinger, I believe the word is. I think he liked to be admired by poor Carla."

"What happened to the poor kid? She must have been a real beauty once."

Dane shrugged. "From what I heard, it was one of those after a dance rides. About four, five years ago. Too much booze, too little sense. The boy who was driving Carla home wrapped his roadster around a tree. He died. She lived, if you want to call it living. The



MR. JONES

surgeon did a lousy job on her, that's for sure. She's pretty hopeful about getting her face fixed. I don't see what anyone can do now."

Jefferson's voice was non-committal.

"They do pretty wonderful things these days. Would the operation have helped her?"

"Maybe," Dane said, "but I doubt it. In fact, I'm not sure Morris wouldn't have run away if he didn't have her face as an excuse for not becoming serious. I mean, Carla didn't expect him to really love her. She didn't expect any man to really do that, but once she was fixed up it would have been differ-

ent. I think George might have run."

"Did she know all this?"

"I don't know. I've been trying to look back, think about it. I can't be sure. I want to be sure, because if she really understood George all along, then she'd have no real reason to kill him. But—"

"But if she had just found out, maybe through another woman, or because she found he had another woman, then she might have gone off the deep end," Sears said.

"Yes, it's possible, especially with the operation coming today," Dane said.

"All right. Now tell me about Morris. What had he been working on that—"

The secret service man got no farther. A movement, seen at the corner of his eye, drew his attention quickly. The blonde at the stern of the cruiser was advancing toward him, tall and slim and heavy-breasted. The muscular young man walked a step behind her.

VII

FOR ONE INSTANT, unseen by Dane, Walt Jefferson's face seemed to change, become a different face—the face of Samuel Sears hidden behind its disguise.

An instant, and gone, and he waited for the woman.

"Who's your guest?" the blonde demanded of Maxwell Dane.

"Yeah," the boy echoed, glaring at the stranger.

Dane glanced at the young man, then at his wife. "That's not your business, Phyllis, and certainly it isn't your little dog's business."

"Why you old—" the young man began.

Dane just looked at the boy. "You're on my boat, Mr. Rogers. On my boat you will accept what I say, without protest, or you will get off my boat. And the next time you clench a fist in my direction I'll knock your teeth out!"

For a moment the two men faced each other. Wade Rogers was twenty years younger and an inch taller, but there was no doubt where the power was. Rogers backed off, turned away. Dane smiled. Jefferson watched it all—or Sammy Sears watched it all behind his secret service disguise.

"Impressive as hell," Phyllis Dane said, "but it doesn't distract me, you hear? I know a gumshoe when I see one. I told you what I'd do if I ever caught you hiring some shabby snooper to nose around me!"

"Mr. Jefferson is not a detective, my dear," Dane said calmly. "If I ever hire a man to watch your little games, you won't be likely to meet him on the boat."

The woman continued to eye Sears in his disguise with great suspicion. "Then it must be about that little Van Beuren chit. I suppose you're going to try to help her?"

"She's my secretary and my friend," Dane snapped.

"I know what she is," Phyllis Dane snarled. "I'm only surprised she killed that bum Morris and not you!"

"Why, Mrs. Dane?" Sears asked.

She laughed. "Don't let little Carla's face fool you. She was no saint. Men pitied her, and comforted her, and dear Maxwell here was no exception. She had him by the tail, believe me."

"I like her, Phyllis," Dane said evenly, "no more."

"And you don't like me," Phyllis Dane said. "That's all right. Only don't let me find out there is anything going on, not ever. At least there's one blessing; little Carla won't get her face fixed now. No point in being beautiful in prison for life."

The blonde turned on her heel and undulated off with Wade Rogers hurrying after her. Sears watched them go from behind the contact lenses that changed his eye color.

"Was there anything to that, Mr. Dane? I'll find out. A man in your position doesn't become vulnerable by playing games with his secretary."

"There is nothing to it."

"Your wife just likes to make scenes?"

"That's right. She thinks it distracts me from thinking about her little affairs. She's a simple woman. Since none of her affairs ever come

to anything, I let her play her charades."

"All right! Let's get back to the point. What had Morris been working on?"

"The new remote detonator mainly, I'm afraid," Dane said. "He was helping me to negotiate the contract, and dealing with both Carson Controls and Alex Norman."

"What was he doing at Carson?"

"Ostensibly we cooperate on certain mutual problems in the field. Actually we spy on each other. Morris visited them and talked to Berg, their president, quite often."

"Did he see Berg yesterday?"

"Yes."

"And Alexander Norman?"

"Morris was handling the job of keeping Norman out of my hair. I have no desire to sell, but Norman is a stubborn man. I wouldn't put anything past him. As a matter of fact, we've had some small troubles in the plant I might be tempted to call sabotage. Norman wants my business."

"Did Morris see Norman yesterday?"

"Yes," Dane said, and frowned. "I thought about this. He did just happen to visit them both yesterday. I don't like it, now that I think of it."

"Does Miss Van Beuren know about the detonator?"

"She does, and about Norman and Carson Controls."

"What do you know about this Dolores Steed, who was with Morris when he was killed? She claimed to be a girl friend."

Dane nodded. "I know. That puzzles me, frankly. I never heard of Dolores Steed, and I'm sure I never saw Morris with anyone like her description."

"What do you make of that?"

"I don't know. Either she's lying, or she's a very new girl of his, or he had some hidden life I didn't know about."

"Could he have had?"

"What man couldn't? I don't put him to bed at night. Or, I suppose I should say I didn't put him to bed. It's hard to realize George is dead, shot!"

"Can you think of any reason for him being killed? Anything at all beyond Miss Van Beuren?"

Dane seemed to think for some time, staring out to sea. At last the business man sighed. "No, not a single reason. Morris wasn't even a scientist; he knew nothing about our work that he could have sold to anyone."

"And as far as you know nothing is missing from your plant or labs?"

"Nothing!" Dane cried. "That was the first thing I did, check my secret data. Nothing has been touched. I'm sure of it."

Sears seemed to consider. "But nothing says for sure that some scheme hadn't been planned."

"No, nothing says that," Dane said, "but, damn it, man, I just don't

see George Morris being involved in anything shady. What reason did he have? I paid him well. He shared in the profits, he had all he wanted. He was popular and happy."

Sears, playing his role of Walt Jefferson, had nothing to say to that, but in his mind he thought drily that there were few men he had ever met who were completely happy, and that happiness had never stopped men from greed—for money or for power.

Yet the picture that Dane had painted did not give him much to go on. What Dane was saying, simply, was that there had been no reason for anyone to murder George Morris. But someone had.

Carla Van Beuren? He still did not believe that. There are facts and facts, and a person's character is also a witness.

He turned to swear Dane to secrecy before he left, and saw the business man step closer to the lee rail. He looked where Dane looked. Another small boat was on its way out to the cruiser. A man sat in the stern of the small boat and waved once.

A giant of a man in an old-fashioned black suit.

A big, ruddy face under thick, snow-white hair.

VIII

THE WHITE-HAIRED giant climbed briskly aboard the cruiser and strode toward Dane and the

disguised Sears. The surgeon-detective tensed. His disguise would be tested. He knew the giant man: Jasper Magruder, the great lawyer and legal philanthropist. A man who was almost a legend both for his own brilliant legal work and for his world-renowned Magruder Foundation.

Sears had done considerable work with the Magruder Foundation. It had been established ten years ago by Magruder as the first private foundation designed to give legal help to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

It charged no fees and no expenses, defended anyone who needed legal aid, and battled the biggest opponents.

It was well-known that Magruder put all his high-fees for his private work into the foundation, and it had been honored by ten governments over the years.

Magruder was a quick, shrewd man, and Sears waited with a certain apprehension as the lawyer approached. He did not have to worry. Magruder gave him a searching look, a brief stare, and then smiled to Dane.

"Hello, Maxwell. I hear you need me, eh?"

"Damn good of you to come, Jasper," Dane said.

"I go where I can do a job." Magruder said drily, and glanced at Sears in his disguise. "Introduce me, Maxwell."

"I know who you are, Mr. Ma-



MISS AGATHA BRIDGE, R.N.

gruder," Sears said. "I'm Walt Jefferson, Defense Department."

"Ah, the hush-hush, eh?" Magruder said. "Well, I'm not here for that stuff. What about this girl of yours, Dane?"

"They've arrested her. It doesn't look good. I understand they have seven witnesses, six of them total strangers."

Magruder became thoughtful. "Six? And her face can't be missed, eh? Not good, but I've defended worse. Did she do it, Maxwell?"

Dane looked away, was silent, then said, "I don't know, Jasper. That's the truth."

"Good. I wouldn't believe you if you said you did know."

Sears watched the giant lawyer. Magruder seemed concerned, even eager. It was clear that Dane had been expecting the lawyer to arrive.

"Just how do you happen to be involved in this, Mr. Magruder?" Sears said. "No offense—my department is naturally interested with the contracts Dane has."

"No offense taken, young man," Magruder said. "I'm in it because I do legal work for Dane Electronics, and Dane called me when the girl was arrested. Naturally, I came over at once. Does that cover the ground?"

"It explains it all nicely," Sears said, smiling.

"Good," Magruder said, "then suppose we get down to the meat. Witnesses have been wrong before, even six impartial ones. The problem is simply to prove the girl was somewhere else. Now, have you heard from her since her arrest?"

"No," Dane said.

"Not good. She must be having difficulty accounting for her whereabouts. However, that's not unusual. Few people can really say exactly what they were doing at any given time unless they plan to in advance, and that's suspicious in itself. Tell me what you know."

Dane told the big lawyer. Sears listened. It was just about what he knew. Magruder became grim.

"So she was alone almost from noon on yesterday until she appeared in the office of this Dr.

Sears, a good surgeon, but something of a playboy. However, he's honest enough. That plastic surgery bit is unfortunate. It obviously means nothing—she couldn't have hoped to have the surgery done in time—but won't sound too good to a jury."

Magruder began to pace the deck. "I'll talk to her and get her story. If she didn't do it, then she had to be somewhere else, and that's what we have to prove. Not much point working on motive or cause; it sounds like the police have enough on both of those, and, true or not, we can't refute it. With Morris dead, we'll never prove he didn't brush her off and make her break mentally."

"What about motive for someone else?" Sears said.

"What about it, young man?"

"If Miss Van Beuren didn't kill him, someone else did."

"Obviously."

"There wouldn't be likely to be two women who looked like Miss Van Beuren."

Magruder nodded slowly. "A frame-up? An impersonation? Yes, it would be logical, Mr. Jefferson. In fact, it would just about have to be, wouldn't it, if she's innocent?"

"I'd say so, and the motive would probably be connected to Morris's work here at Dane."

"That seems logical, too. But that part I'll leave up to Dane and you, eh? I expect the government has ways of investigating that. Yes,

I'd say that's the place to look."

"We'll look," Dane snapped.

"And the sooner the better," Sears said, "so I think I better leave you gentlemen and get started."

"And I'll start on the girl," Magruder said briskly. "Now, Dane, I want everything you know about her. Her past, her habits, her character—"

Sears left them talking. Magruder was already deep in the case. As he climbed back into his small boat, he noticed action at the stern of the cruiser.

The blonde was watching him. Wade Rogers was nowhere in sight.

IX

SEARS' CAR WAS parked some fifty yards from the dock, in an alley behind the deserted afternoon pier. The shadow of the silent buildings fell across the car and alley, and all was silent. His hand was on the handle of the car door, his mind on Carla Van Beuren, when the faint movement among the shadows caught his eye.

He turned just as the man lunged out at him. A young man, muscular, bare to the waist and in tight, white ducks. Wade Rogers.

"Stay away from Dane!"

The words snarled out of the corner of the young man's tight mouth. His fists, clenched into hammers, shot short and straight for Sears' belly.

At the last moment, the fists

inches from his stomach, Sears pivoted, moved his body a hair from the path of the fists. Wade Rogers pummelled air, smashed a fist into the solid door of the car, howled in angry pain.

Rogers fought to regain his balance, swung wildly. Inside the wild swings Sears caught the young man across the throat with the edge of his hand, smashed the choking, gasping Rogers in the face with an elbow.

Bloody, Rogers found a metal bar lying in the alley, grabbed, swung. Sears kicked him in the belly, under the chin. Rogers dropped the bar, staggered back, bleeding and gasping. Sears pinned him to the alley wall with a forearm on the windpipe.

Rogers' eyes bulged, his body strained to break loose.

"Tell me," Sears barked into the young man's face. "Tell me all of it!"

Rogers twisted, hung pinned to the wall like a bug on a pin. "She didn't believe you. Sent me to—scare you off!"

"What's she so afraid of, boy? All of it."

Rogers' eyes looked everywhere. "Thinks you're a private dick. Thinks Dane is playing cute, talks to you in the open so she thinks it's okay."

"Why is she so afraid of a detective? Dane seems not to mind guys like you."

"Not me," Rogers gasped, "an-

other guy, a man, older. She's maybe serious, I don't know. Dane ain't as easy as he looks. He ain't no lily-white baby. He plays around."

"Do you know that?"

"No. She told me. Morris knew. George Morris."

"You're saying Morris could prove Dane was cheating on his wife?"

"She told me," Rogers choked out, squirmed. "Let me go."

"What about Carla Van Beuren? Is that who Dane was playing with?"

"I don't know."

"Who is Mrs. Dane playing with?"

"Don't know that neither. Don't care. I get my pay hanging around, makin' her feel good."

Sears took his arm away, released the choking boy. "Go back and make her feel good, and don't try a man's work again."

The boy rubbed his bloody face, touched his tender throat. He started to speak, and saw Sears' cold eyes. He turned and slunk off without a word.

Sears watched Rogers stumble from the alley. An eager punk out to impress his lady meal ticket. A lady worried about her rich husband catching her at a serious affair. Or was she?

According to the boy, George Morris believed that Dane was not an innocent man. And Morris was dead. Whoever had killed him and

framed Carla, if that was what had happened, had been close to Morris and Carla as well. Dane had known them well.

So had Phyllis Dane. Maybe George Morris had been her 'other guy, older.'

Sears got into his Walt Jefferson rented car and started back for the city.

X

DOCTOR SEARS found the name *Dolores Steed* on the building directory. An office building in the upper Seventies, East Side: *Dolores Steed, Inc.*, Party Planning.

An elegant pink door with a gold knob and knocker greeted him on the third floor of the building. A more elegant blond greeted him on the other side of the door.

"May I help you?"

"I want to see Miss Steed."

The blonde smiled sympathetically. Her smile implied that many poor people wanted to see Miss Steed, presumably to plan a party.

"I'm afraid Miss Steed is all booked this morning, Mr—?"

"Jefferson," Sears said, "and she'll see me."

He handed the blonde his secret service card. She was impressed. She didn't buzz, she left her desk and went in through another baby pink door. In the outer office Sears waited.

There were four dazzling ladies in the office. They looked at him

with a combination of faint disapproval for his shabby air, and less faint envy at the way the blonde had hurried off into the inner sanctum to announce him.

Four elegant ladies with too much money and too much time and nothing to do with it but find someone expensive to hire to do what no one needed done. *Give a party? Wonderful! That can be made complicated enough to fill a great deal of time. Get that marvelous Miss Steed, Oh she's a gem! Such chic parties she plans, my dear, you must get her. She can turn a simple party into an affair that will keep you busy for months!*

The blonde jerked Sears from his reflections.

"Miss Steed will see you, Mr. Jefferson."

He pushed through the inner pink door. A gorgeous redhead with full curves even in a severe black suit stood up behind a mammoth yellow desk.

"Mr. Jefferson? What can I possibly do for the secret service?"

She waved him to a seat and sat down again behind her desk.

"You can tell me more about your relationship with George Morris," Sears said bluntly.

She watched him. She lit a long, gold-tipped cigarette. "I see. Of course, George was engaged in government work, wasn't he? Still, I don't quite understand what there is to tell? It seems pretty simple, if ugly, what happened and why."



"Maybe you could just tell me what did happen."

"Don't you know?"

"I'd like to hear it from the closest witness."

"All right," Dolores Steed said, and told him the events of six o'clock the previous night. It was almost word for word what Captain Brian had told him, with the addition of a harsh edge of venom against Carla Van Beuren that was understandable. It was all as a woman whose lover has been murdered by a rival should speak and act. Perfect.

"Then you have no doubt it was Miss Van Beuren?"

"None, how could I? With that face? I'd never met her. I didn't know who she was then, but I do now, and I have no doubt."

"Then that's conclusive," Sears said. "But you're an intelligent woman. You can figure out our problem, right?"

"With George working on secret projects, you're wondering if there was more to his murder than a jealous female. I'm sure you're wrong. I saw her face. I'm only surprised she didn't kill me right then and there."

"You're probably right then. But, just how long had you really known Morris? How close were you?"

Dolores Steed leaned back in her high-backed desk chair. She watched Sears with steady eyes. Sears had the notion that if she hadn't been a woman wearing a skirt she'd have put her feet up on the desk. There was something about Miss Dolores Steed, something hard and efficient and even deadly.

"How close we were is a matter of opinion, and it depends which side you look at," the redhead said evenly. "I met George less than a month ago. I liked him. I think he fell hard for me. Some men do that, I've found."

There was no particular arrogance or pride in the way she said that, only a kind of sober judgment. As if it were a fact she had observed from a distance, and could use to advantage.

"We didn't see each other often. I never met his friends. I'm a busy woman. But we struck a spark, I'd say. He told me he had told Carla Van Beuren that he was breaking off with her."

Sears frowned. Carla Van Beu-

ren had not mentioned that—if it were true.

"And he told you nothing that might have made you suspect his work had anything to do with his death?"

"I didn't even know what he did, beyond being a sales V-P for an electronic outfit. I don't care what a man does, as long as he can afford me."

"But it's your judgment that the murder was purely personal?"

"That's the way it looked to me," Dolores Steed said. "But I don't know very much. All I know is that George Morris was shot in front of me, and I don't want to go through anything like that again. It shook me up pretty badly."

"I'm sure it must have," Sears said. He stood up. "Well, thank you for your time. I'm sure you understand we have to investigate this thing."

"I'd be surprised if you didn't, Mr. Jefferson," the redhead said.

She looked at the disguised Sears with flat, unblinking eyes. He could see no trace of anything suspicious in the way she looked at him. He left her still seated at her desk, quietly watching him leave. She did not smile.

On the quiet East Side street he paused to light a cigarette, and then turned east toward where he had parked his car. His mind was on his next step—he would have to talk to Commissioner Pinto, to see if anything had happened to cast

doubt on Carla Van Beuren's guilt, and he would have to talk to the girl herself.

So far he had uncovered nothing to help Carla Van Beuren. Dolores Steed's story could be partially checked, but he had a strong feeling that with Morris dead, true or false, the story would check as far as it could be checked. And if it looked true, then Carla Van Beuren was—

He saw the man step from the car ahead of him, between him and his parked car.

The second man turned the corner on the far side of the street and came toward him.

He saw a third man inside the car ahead. A faint glimpse of a heavy, swarthy face. For a moment there was something familiar about the face inside the car; then the face turned and was gone. Sammy Sears had other matters to think about.

The two men walking moved on him.

A narrow alley ran between two brownstones near him. He slid into the alley and ran.

XI

SEARS CAME OUT of the narrow alley into a small yard paved with concrete and fenced by a wooden fence. Over the fence to the right was another yard. To the left was the blank wall of a brownstone. Directly ahead, over the fence, was

the back of a tall apartment house on the next street.

He swarmed over the fence at the rear just as footsteps ran out of the small alley behind him. There were no shots and no shouts. Only heavy breathing as he dropped down and sprinted for the open basement door of the apartment house.

In the dark basement of the apartment house he scanned the layout. His eyes gleamed. It was a perfect place. A long, wide corridor was lined with the doors to many small rooms and storage bins for the apartments above. The corridor branched once and led up into the building, and at the far end opened into the boiler room. They could not stay together and hope to trap him here.

As the footsteps came lightly, warily down the stairs from the yard, he glided ahead and into the vast boiler room. He unscrewed the bulb from its socket and waited in the dark near the door. They soon came.

Together at the lighted rectangle of the doorway. One held a pistol. The other switched the light. When nothing happened there was a sudden movement and both shadows vanished from the rectangle of the doorway.

His eyes accustomed to the dark, he waited. He saw the man with the gun probe warily ahead toward the boilers. The other would be watching the door. There was no

other way for them to operate if they wanted to be sure of him. He glided softly toward the door.

Low, and against the cold concrete of the wall, he moved with his eyes watching the cracks of light around the now closed door. He saw the light vanish. The man at the door stood near and behind it. Then the man with the gun croaked from near the boilers:

"Some light, Cooney. Open the door."

The door opened again and a path of light crossed the room.

"There's something behind the boiler," the man with the gun croaked out. "You, government boy, you ain't got a chance."

Sears waited. The man at the door moved into the path of light. A short, thick man with sadistic eyes and an object in his left hand. An ice pick! Thin, shining needle blade filed down to three inches and a point that could pierce steel.

Sears moved with the speed and silence of a leopard. The squat man turned. The ice pick moved toward him. Sears' left hand caught the man's wrist, and his right hand grasped the man's neck. His surgeon's fingers found the spot and squeezed. The man went limp like a sack of old clothes and slid to the floor.

He grasped the ice-pick, cried out as if he were the man he had attacked, "Uggghhhhhhhhh!"

Then dashed through the lighted door and along the corridor.

"You! Hold it!"

It was the man with the gun shouting, no longer afraid to shout here in the deserted silence of the basement.

"I'll shoot—"

Then heavy running footsteps, and the man with the gun pounded toward the door. Sears reached a side door in the corridor and dashed inside. It was a small storage room cluttered with boxes and old trunks. In the dark he waited, the door ajar.

The man with the gun came along the corridor running. Sears let the door close slowly. The running feet stopped:

"Hah!"

The feet came on, burst open the door, strode in, and fell over two trunks pushed in the man's way. Sears jumped. The man half turned, trying to swing his pistol. Sears punched the ice pick down and into the man just below the occipital bulge. The man collapsed instantly and lay still.

Sears wasted no more time with the man. The man was dead. There was no more vulnerable spot. He had learned that as a surgeon, and had learned the ways and need to kill swiftly in the OSS. He had no illusions as to what the two men had had in mind for him. They had not been after him to talk.

The other man would be unconscious for some time longer. Sears hurried back the way he had come.

When he reached the street from

the narrow alley the car from which one of the men had come was still there. He had one more glimpse of the heavy, swarthy face in the car. A quick, but clear glimpse.

He stopped and stared.

The man in the car pulled away from the curb in a screech of rubber. Sears did not follow. He stood, his disguised face a mask of deep concentration and puzzlement.

He had remembered the face in the car—but it could not have been the face of the man he had thought it was.

That man had died a year ago.



XII

COMMISSIONER Pinto said, "Nick Remuda? Impossible, Samuel!"

"I know, but I'm sure it was Remuda's face."

Sears, himself again, sat in the office of Police Commissioner Angelo Pinto. He watched the incredulous commissioner, as Pinto paced his office. Now Pinto turned again and faced the surgeon.

"Remuda's been dead and buried for a year."

"Tell me the details again?"

Pinto waved his expressive hands. A small, peppery man, the commissioner talked as much with his hands as with his voluble old-country-style voice.

"Damn it, Sammy, you know the details as well as I do. Nick Remuda was one of the most dangerous bank robbers we've had. He

died in a shack out in Jamaica Bay when we cornered him after his last job. There was a fire. He was burned badly, but not his face! The identification was absolute. I saw him myself."

"His face? No fingerprints, scars, bridgework?"

"His hands were burned off. Most of his body was burned. The teeth may have been checked, but I doubt it. We had no question of identity. Seven of us knew him on sight. What better identification can you get than six men who know his face?"

"Almost any identification would be better than his face," Sears said quietly. "I'm not the only great plastic surgeon in the world," and Sears grinned.

"You're suggesting that a plastic surgeon had made someone's face

into Remuda's face and killed him?"

"Perhaps. Or perhaps Remuda is dead, and someone else has his face now."

"Why? The face of a known criminal?"

"A dead criminal, and I don't know why, Angelo," Sears said, "but faces seem to be very important all of a sudden—identifiable faces."

Pinto jumped up and began to pace again. "All right. You want to believe that Carla Van Beuren is innocent. So you're hinting that someone with a face made to look exactly like her very obvious face killed Morris."

"If she didn't kill him, it has to be that: someone disguised to look like her, the whole affair staged," Sears said.

"Sure, a disguise. Fine! Swell, Sammy. I give Mr. Jones all the credit for being smart and usually right," Pinto said. "For our Mr. Jones a hunch is fine. Go to work, prove me wrong. I'll like that. But there's nothing I can do."

Pinto sat down. "What do I tell my detectives? What do I tell the mayor? That everything there is points to Carla Van Beuren as guilty: witnesses; motive, her own actions, her state of mind. Facts say she has to be guilty, so I've got a hunch that she isn't?"

"Do I say that my mysterious friend Mr. Jones says she isn't guilty, so I forget all the facts? Do

I say that I've got no possible other motive for Morris being killed, no hint that anyone else is involved, but I'm sure my seven eye witnesses are wrong?"

"You've got a hint that someone else is involved, Angelo. Those two hoods were out to kill me. There has to be a reason. Someone else is mixed up in this."

"No, Sammy, not you. They didn't try to kill *you*, Samuel Sears. They tried to kill you in disguise. Which means they were out to get Mr. Jones, and I can think of a lot of people who might want to kill Mr. Jones."

"So you can't help me?"

"My hands are tied, Sammy. I'd be out of my job if a hint got upstairs that I was wasting taxpayers money on such an open-and-shut case."

"So it's really a job for Mr. Jones."

"It looks like it, Sammy. I'm sorry again, but that's why you created Jones. Get me something to go on, Sam, and I'll move then."

Sears nodded. It was why he had created his second identity. To catch the untouchables.

"Okay, Angelo. Tell me all you have so far."

Pinto clasped his hands behind his head. "We've checked out the six witnesses. They're all clean, above suspicion. They saw what they saw. We've checked the woman, Dolores Steed. She's a hard nut, a female tiger, but she has two

witnesses to her affair with Morris."

"What kind of witnesses?"

"Two friends of hers."

"No friends of Morris's? No letters?"

"No. And no one neutral who remembers them together before last night, but they were together last night, and for the rest we have to take her word. We can't refute her story."

"What about Morris? Any hints of any unusual actions?"

"None. We've checked into him with a computer, and we're still checking, but so far we haven't found him involved in anything that could have gotten him killed. Nothing illegal, not even anything shady. We've studied everything he's been doing, and he comes up clean."

"The murder gun?"

"Haven't found it yet."

Sears frowned. "Isn't that odd? I mean, Carla must have blocked it all out if she did it, so she wouldn't have known what the gun meant if she had it. You should have found it."

"Not necessarily. She probably ditched it while she was still aware of what she'd done. Now she wouldn't even remember. We may never find it."

"What about her alibi?"

Pinto shrugged. "She doesn't have one, Sammy. According to her, she got off at noon from her office over in New Jersey, and took that boat ride around Manhattan. No one saw her. Then she went to

the apartment of her friend Aurora Heller. Miss Heller was in Boston. Carla says she never left the apartment after that. She swears to it. She just stayed there until she left for your office the next day!"

"So no one saw her?"

"No, Sammy, someone saw her all right," Pinto said grimly. "I said that *she* said she never left the apartment, but the doorman and elevator operator both saw her leave the apartment and the building at about five o'clock! She came back looking half-crazy at six-thirty! Just about right for a six o'clock killing at The Mayfair Towers."

Sears was silent. He was stunned. Not only didn't Carla Van Beuren have an alibi, she was apparently lying about the little alibi she did have.

"It's cold," Pinto said. "This time it's cold, Sam."

"Too cold," Sears said. "Too perfect, Angelo. The only thing missing is the gun found on her."

"All right, Sam. Then what was she doing between five and six-thirty? What are you telling me? That she so conveniently cooperated with the people who framed her that she kept nicely out of sight for an hour and a half, and then lied about ever having been out?"

Sears scowled. "I don't know what I'm telling you, Angelo, except that it's all too open and shut. Did she kill him, then walk home and make herself look like a liar?"

She just went about her business when she knew seven people had seen her shoot Morris?"

"Hysterical collapse, Sam. She forgot it, shut it out of her head, Look, Sammy, it's psychologically consistent; you know that. Too much strain all at once: the operation, worry, Morris tells her it's all over before she can become beautiful, and *bang!* Add to that a killing, and her mind goes blank in defense. You know it's absolutely logical. There won't even be a trial, Sam. We'll get the doctors and she'll be committed."

"End of case, closed," Sears said. "Too easy, Angelo. Much too easy. It's consistent, yes, but not with Carla Van Beuren. She really didn't believe Morris loved her, she was and always has been defensive. She would have simply drawn into her shell, gone away. She's a lick-wounds type, not a violent type."

Pinto was up again, volatile and quicksilver. "Okay, go on working. I agree you should. Bring me facts, even one fact that doesn't fit, and I'll stick my neck out. Until then, I'm helpless."

"What I need is a reason for Morris to be murdered," Sears said slowly. "Some other reason, and I've got a pretty good hunch that the man who looked like Nick Remuda and tried to have me killed is the reason"

"Go to it, Mr. Jones," Pinto said, and he was not smiling. The commissioner was as aware as Sears

that the city, and the world, was full of criminals walking around free, untouchable.

"I better talk to Carla now," Sears said.

XIII

CARLA SAT SMALL in the cell. Her eyes turned up to Sears, wide and confused.

"But I couldn't have killed George. I couldn't have! I never insisted that he loved me. Perhaps, after the operation, I had hopes, but I never fooled myself."

She seemed to have shrunk since Sears had seen her last. In the drab prison garb the chic, sophisticated executive secretary and finishing school girl had vanished, leaving only a scared girl. Sears had seen it before, the facade of privilege and ease fading beneath the harsh realities of a grim justice.

"You told the police that you never left the apartment of your friend after you got there," Sears said.

"I didn't! I know I didn't!" the girl cried. "When I got there I showered, had a drink for my nerves, and then I read. I became drowsy and took a nap. I was quite tired, and I didn't wake up until after seven. I never left the apartment!"

"But the doorman and the elevator operator saw you."

"They're lying!"

"Why would they lie, Carla?"

"I don't know! I don't know anything about any of it!" the girl began to cry hysterically. "I don't know! I don't know!"

"People need a reason to lie."

"Why?" she cried. "It's all a lie, and I don't know a reason. If six people can say they saw me kill George, two others can say they saw me leave when I didn't leave! It's hopeless, hopeless!"

Sears watched her as she held her face and the tears came. She did not cry long; there was a lot of iron in Carla Van Beuren. She looked up at him, wiped her eyes.

"I'm sorry. You're very good to take an interest in a nothing like me. But what can you do? You're a doctor, not a policeman or a magician."

"I probably can't do much, Carla," Sears said quietly, "but I know a man who can do a great deal. He has a lot of experience in this kind of trouble, and he learns the truth."

"The truth?" she said bitterly. "How can he find that? Who is this miracle man?"

"He's known only as Mr. Jones, Carla. You won't see him, but he'll be working for you, and for the truth," Sears said. "Now what can you tell me about the seventh witness? Miss Steed?"

"Nothing," Carla said, "absolutely nothing. I never heard of her. George certainly never mentioned her. He didn't say a word about having met a new woman, much



ANGELO PINTO

less falling in love with her. And he didn't tell me we were through."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I hadn't talked to him out of the office in days, and why would he tell me such a thing? I had no strings on George. That was understood."

"All right, Carla. Now can you think of any reason for Morris to be murdered?"

"No, none."

"What about his work?"

"Well, he was working on the contract for the new detonator, I suppose you could call that sensitive work. There might be people who would want to steal the plans and specifications, but George wasn't a scientist. He didn't know

anything about the detonator technically. He didn't really have access to the secret data."

"He had access to the plant on a high level, and there are ways of getting to secret data when you're inside," Sears said drily. "What about this Alexander Norman? I hear he wants to buy Dane out very badly."

"Yes, and George was handling the job of turning him down, but Mr. Norman is a very wealthy man. Why would he kill George?"

"There are other things than money, Carla. Especially to a man like Norman, who's always had money. He's a fanatic. I have a hunch he wanted Dane's company for more than just business reasons."

She looked at Sears. "You think he wanted to gain control of the detonator?"

"My friend Mr. Jones thinks it possible," Sears said.

The girl was silent. Then: "I can't believe it. I want to believe it. I have to believe that George was murdered for some reason I don't know, but I've talked to Mr. Norman, and I can't believe he would resort to murder. He's much too arrogant about his position, power and money for that. He's sure he'll get his way sooner or later."

"Perhaps," Sears said. "Is there anything else you can think of to tell me?"

"No, what can I tell you? I never

left that apartment. No one saw me there, so I can't prove it."

Sears was grim. "Think carefully, Carla. That is the key to all of it. If you are sure you didn't leave the apartment, and the doorman and elevator operator are equally sure that you did, then something happened that we don't know."

"No, I can't remember anything. I took a nap, no more."

Sears nodded. "All right, I'll tell Mr. Jones. After that it's up to him. I don't have any idea what to do. Try to stay calm, Carla. Mr. Jones will find out the truth."

She nodded, and he left her there on the narrow bunk in the dim cell—a small, beaten figure in prison drab. He went out and down to his car. He was thinking hard.

The key was that time in her friend's apartment—whether she had been asleep or out in the streets. Because if Carla Van Beuren had not killed Morris, then someone had gone to a lot of trouble to impersonate her, and to make sure that the impersonation would work, *the killer had to be sure exactly where Carla was at the time of the murder.*

The killer had to be certain that Carla was out of the way, could not suddenly appear somewhere and be seen, and had no alibi.

XIV

A FEW HOURS later, just after dark that night, a man rang the bell

of an elegant town house in the East Eighties just off Fifth Avenue. The man was tall and slender and wore a well-cut grey suit and topcoat. His grey homburg tilted at a rakish angle.

As he waited the man studied his appearance in the glass of the outer door. He touched the bridge of his long, thin nose. His green eyes seemed satisfied. Samuel Sears was satisfied with his new disguise—the tall, thin, dapper Monroe Farr, ace feature writer for *Current Society Magazine*.

He had decided on the new guise for two reasons. First, Walt Jefferson was a target for someone, and that almost destroyed his usefulness to Sears. Second, a new role was needed so that he could change his line of questioning.

A third reason was that the sudden appearance of a major writer for a national magazine might scare someone into a rash action to cover up. Sears doubted this, but it was a chance. The people who were behind this, if Carla were innocent, were clever and well-organized, and would not panic.

As the door opened he ended his thoughts, composed his face in his disguise, and concentrated on thinking like Monroe Farr.

"Yes, sir?" a tall butler said.

"Mr. Farr to see Mr. Van Beuren. I have an appointment."

"Thank you, sir. If you'll step in?"

He stepped into a small but

grand entrance hall. It was all marble and towered two stories. A circular staircase led up from the rear. The butler took his homburg, and went up the stairs. He returned in seconds, and led Sears up to a large sitting room on the second floor.

A small, slim man of about sixty, with a delicate face filled now with lines of worry, stood to greet him. Behind the man, on a brocade couch, was a small woman perched like a bird about to fly. There were two other men in the room.

One was Maxwell Dane, and the other was the white-haired lawyer and philanthropist, Jasper Magruder. Sears showed no recognition of them, and they did not recognize him in his new disguise.

The small man said, "I agreed to see you, Mr. Farr, only to beg you to refrain from publicizing our daughter's tragedy."

"Sorry, I can't do that. My magazine wants the story and I intend to get it. All I can promise is an accurate, fair, objective article. No dirt. If you do talk to me you're sure of getting an accurate story. If you don't talk to me I'll have to get my facts elsewhere, from secondary sources, and I couldn't promise an accurate or fair story that way."

Maxwell Dane and Magruder stood up and glared at Sears. It was Dane who spoke first:

"That sounds a damn lot like blackmail, Farr!"

Sears turned and gave Dane a

cold look. "Ah, Maxwell Dane, of course. Standing by your employee, I see? But, then, they were both your employees, weren't they?"

"Why you—"

The small Mr. Van Beuren spoke softly but with a voice like a knife. "Enough of that, Dane. I'll have no brawling in my house. What Mr. Farr says makes sense. I don't imagine we can expect to hide our trouble in this day and age. Very well, Mr. Farr, what can we tell you?"

"First you can tell me what Mr. Jasper Magruder is doing here? I understood you considered your daughter innocent."

"I do, but I'm not a fool," Van Beuren said. "Mr. Magruder is an associate of Mr. Dane, and has volunteered his services. I'm not turning down a man of Mr. Magruder's caliber."

Sears turned to Magruder. "How is it going, Magruder?"

The white-haired giant didn't blink. "I expect, Mr. Farr, that you know perfectly well how it's going. Not good."

"I heard about Miss Van Beuren's alibi," Sears agreed. "You don't have much case."

"I have what I have, Mr. Farr," Magruder said.

"Innocent or guilty?"

"There is no question of guilt in a legal sense, Mr. Farr," Magruder said. "Miss Van Beuren is either a victim of some fantastic scheme, or she's mentally unbalanced."

"How are you doing on the scheme idea? Have you come up with anything that points to anyone else?"

There was a silence in the elegant sitting room. Dane looked at the floor and Magruder studied his fingernails. Mr. Van Beuren touched the thin shoulder of his wife.

Van Beuren said, "I admit that it does not look good for our daughter just now. But I am convinced that she is innocent, and with Mr. Magruder's help we will prove that."

"I hope you do," Sears said. "Did you know about her affair with Morris?"

"We knew she liked the man. We did not know how serious it was. Carla is not an effusive child."

"Did you know about her planned operation?"

"No."

"Did you talk to her at all after noon yesterday?"

"No, we did not."

"Did anyone talk to you? Did you see anyone or anything suspicious around your house?"

"No, I'm afraid we saw and heard nothing. When the police came to us at seven o'clock we were totally surprised. We did not even know where Carla was."

"Have you two learned anything about Morris?" Sears asked Magruder and Dane.

"Certainly nothing we'll tell you," Dane snapped.

Magruder said, "Take it easy, Maxwell. Mr. Farr will find out from the police anyway. No, Farr, we've found nothing that constitutes a motive for any other killer as yet."

Sears said, "What about Dane? Maybe he had a reason for wanting Morris out of the way? Where were you at six o'clock yesterday, Dane?"

"In my office," Dane cried, "if that is any of your business! You and your rag had better be careful what you print about me."

"We'll be careful," Sears said. "Of course, an alibi doesn't mean a lot in this case, does it? Obviously if Miss Van Beuren didn't kill Morris, it was some kind of conspiracy with more than one person involved."

Magruder snapped. "Do you have any facts to suggest that, Farr?"

"If I do, I'll take them to the police."

"If you do have facts," Mr. Van Beuren said, "that's all I ask—take them to the police."

Dane snapped, "The best thing Farr could do is stay out of it all the way!"

"I tend to agree," Magruder said. "Notoriety is not going to help our case."

"I'm not so sure," Sears said. "I think sweeping it quietly under the rug is a sure way to get Carla Van Beuren in an asylum fast."

"My daughter is neither guilty



nor insane, Mr. Farr," Van Beuren said, "and I intend to see that that is proved."

"I wish you luck," Sears said.

He left the parents deep in conference with Magruder and Dane. In the street again he lit a cigarette and felt discouraged. Everywhere he turned all the answers were the same. He was still thinking about this when he noticed the black car cruising slowly along the street in the dark spring night.

Sears shrank back into the shadows of the wall.

The car passed slowly, seemed to slow for an instant in front of the Van Beuren town house, and then went on. Sears did not think they had seen him. He was not even sure the men in the car had been looking for him, but they had been watching the house.

Suddenly he felt better again.

Someone was much too worried about the murder of George Morris. Nothing he could prove, just a feeling, but Mr. Jones could work on his feelings when the police could not.

He went to his car and drove off. For his next step he would not need a disguise.

XV

DR. SAMUEL SEARS, as a friend of Carla Van Beuren's, and armed with a police warrant, used the superintendent's pass key to enter the apartment of Aurora Heller in the renovated old brownstone building.

"I'm picking up some private things Miss Van Beuren left here," Sears explained to the manager.

"Of course," the manager agreed after seeing the warrant. "A terrible affair. We all knew Miss Van Beuren quite well. She often visited Miss Heller."

"So your elevator man and door-man couldn't be mistaken?"

"I'm afraid not. They both know her on sight."

"They told the police she was alone."

"I believe they did. I do hope it works out well for her."

Now Sears stood inside the apartment. It was quiet and neat, a good apartment. Nothing gaudy yet everything expensive and with taste. Miss Aurora Heller lived high but conservatively.

There was no one in the apartment. Evidences of the police search were there, but it had been a good search, and not much was out of place. Carla Van Beuren's small bag stood on the floor in the bedroom. The police had searched it but left it.

Sears stood in the bedroom and studied it. The bed had been slept in—by one person. Nothing much else had been used. A book lay open on the bed table as if just put down. It was a travel book describing the major cities of Europe.

The closets were full of female clothes, but they were not those of Carla Van Beuren. Aurora Heller was clearly larger all around.

The bureaus were stuffed with female clothes also, again not those of Carla Van Beuren.

He searched the whole apartment. In the kitchen there was little food in the refrigerator, and evidence of one person having had coffee.

He found no traces of anyone else having been in the apartment, unless the police had taken it away, and then Commissioner Pinto would have told him.

He had about given up, ready to leave, when his glance fell on a cushion in an overstuffed chair. The seat cushion was not set quite right in the chair. All the rest of the apartment was as neat as a display room.

Sears went to the chair and lifted the cushion. There was nothing

under it. But the inner upholstery of the chair, under the cushion, was raised. Something was down between the seat under the cushion, and the back of the chair. He reached down and found it. He pulled it out.

It was a large .45 caliber automatic.

Sears sniffed it, and examined the clip. The pistol had been fired seven times! It had been fired recently. Sears had no doubt that it was the gun that had killed George Morris.

In the silent room he held the ugly gun. It was the clincher. Now he was sure—Carla Van Beuren had killed no one!

Where the gun had been the police would not have missed it.

No, someone had been just too eager, too clever. As long as the gun had been missing he had not been absolutely sure that Carla hadn't blacked out and thrown it somewhere. Now he was sure.

Just a little bit too much, too perfect. That had trapped a killer more than once.

He went back to searching the room even more carefully. Now he was looking for something else. In some way they had managed to control Carla and make her think she was sleeping when she was actually out of the apartment!

It took him two hours.

The silence of the apartment hung over him like a shroud, pressed down like a weight on his

back as he studied every inch of the place.

He finally found the tiny hole drilled in the wall at the edge of the bedroom window that opened on to the fire escape. A hole so tiny almost no one could have seen it even if they had been looking for it, and no one else had been looking for it.

The hole had been plastered up again, but the job had been hasty, and the new plaster sank in a hair in the hole, and the new paint was a shade lighter than the old paint. A few dry crumbs of plaster were barely visible on the floor beneath the window.

On the window itself he found the very faintest marks of a jimmy of some kind.

The tiny hole had been drilled for some reason, and the window had been opened from the outside—opened by an expert.

In the bedroom where Carla Van Beuren had been napping.

All right, Sears said to himself, there has to be a reason and a connection. Why drill a tiny hole in a wall? To push something through the hole. Check. Push what?

A pipe? A tube? A small bomb? Something to introduce gas into a room. Because how do you make a sleeping woman sleep so deeply she doesn't know what is happening? You drug her.

Fine. Something is sent into the room through a tiny hole that drugs her so that you can jimmy the win-

down and get in safely. Once inside what do you do? Simple:

You do something that will make a sleeping woman get up and walk out of an apartment, looking awake and normal, stay out for two hours, and then come back, go back to bed, and wake up unaware she has been out.

Do you make her kill while she's out?

Negative, doubtful. A shock like that might snap her out of whatever you have put her into.

But you make her do everything else nice and cooperative; make her stay out of sight while you fake a murder *by her*!

Hypnotize her? Drugs first and then hypnosis? Very probable. A special kind of—

"Who the devil are you!!"

Sears whirled.

XVI -

THE GIRL IN the open doorway into the bedroom was tall and dark, and almost too beautiful. Her black hair was like a halo on her shoulders, and her long, slim legs were the reason mini-skirts had been invented. The green mini dress clung to her hips and breasts like wet cellophane. Her face was a photographer's dream, from its wide, bright green eyes to the full, pouted lips.

"I—" Sears began.

The girl stopped him with a wide smile. "Samuel Sears! Of course

—the dazzling surgeon! Do you know that I've been trying to get an introduction to you for a year? Ever since I saw you across a room at the Vanderbilt Museum opening!"

"All you had to do was say hello."

"Oh no, much too obvious. I never chase men. Gives them big ideas."

"I gather you're Aurora Heller?"

"That I am. Did you come— No, it's Carla, isn't it? I heard, just a little while ago. I came right down. Where is she?"

"In jail, I'm afraid."

The girl exploded. "Oh those stupid idiots! As if Carla could kill anyone, especially that George Morris."

"You didn't like Morris?"

"Like? I didn't care one way or the other. A playboy without much talent for the job. Frankly, I found him dull. Poor Carla would have, if she hadn't—well, her face made her grateful for any male who looked at her, the fool! As if she didn't have more beauty in her finger than I have in my whole body."

"No, I wouldn't say that," Sears said. "That would be slander to your body, and a patent lie. He looked at her quickly, from shoulders to shoes. "You have a most beautiful body, Miss Heller."

She smiled. "If you're going to talk about my body, you better

call me Aurora. And shall we talk about my body some more? Or your body? I like lean men, especially with shoulders. I like your hands. Surgeon's hands. Oh, I know all about you, Dr. Samuel Sears. The untouchable heart-breaker."

"Not so untouchable."

"But a heartbreaker? I wonder just how worthwhile you are? I wonder if you'll break my heart?"

"Am I going to have the chance?"

She watched him.

"Yes," she said. "Yes I think you are."

For a moment their eyes met in the silent room. He smiled. She took three steps and rested her head on his shoulder. Then she stood on her toes and kissed him. When his arms went around her, she went limp. Her lips were soft, very soft. Her green eyes looked into his eyes. Then she stepped back.

"I'll be ready when you come back in two hours," she said.

"No," he said.

"No?" Her brows arched.

"I have some things to do, Aurora. For Carla."

"What can you do, Sam? Is Sam okay? Now?"

"Sam is fine, anytime. And I can't do much, but I know a man who can. He's waiting for me."

She nodded, then turned and sat on the bed. She lit a cigarette, blew smoke.



"Carla, yes. She couldn't have killed anyone. I've been thinking about it all the way down on the plane. It has to be something to do with that company she works for. She told me a little about the trouble they've been having."

"Trouble?" Sears said, watching her.

She nodded. "Yes, about this new contract, and that Alexander Norman person who wants to buy Dane out. I know Norman, and he's a fanatic who can't be trusted with matches. He'd kill anyone who got in his way like swatting a fly."

"Do you have any reason to suspect Norman?"

"Only that I know him."

"You'll need more than that."

"I'll get more. I've been planning a few little surprises for Mr. Norman all the way down."

"Stay away from this, Aurora. It's too dangerous. I can't even handle it myself, but I know—"

"Life is dangerous, Sam. At least, all that's worthwhile about life is dangerous. I have an invi-

tation to a party at Norman's tonight, and I'm going. He throws a half party-half rally every month. I've never gone. He's been after me. This time I'll go, and I won't be there to party."

Sears paced the room. Then he turned to look at the girl. She looked like some princess out of the Arabian Nights as she sat on the bed in the green mini-sheath. But there was strength in her green eyes.

"Can you get me into the party?"

"Yes. Norman is the kind of man who collects people. He wants everyone to tell him what a great leader he'd make—for the whole world, as near as I can tell. He'll welcome the great Dr. Samuel Sears with open arms. Just don't turn your back."

"I won't. All right, I'll be back for you in an hour. Not two."

"I'll be ready," she said.

He picked up Carla Van Beuren's bag and started for the door. He heard her move on the bed. Her voice was soft, as soft as her lips had been.

"Sam."

He turned. She lay on the bed, unmoving, only her green eyes watching him. He walked slowly toward her.

"Sam?" she said.

He bent and kissed her. Her arms clung to his neck for a long minute. Then she let him go.

"I'll be ready," she said.

XVII

THE DOORMAN OF Aurora Heller's apartment saw the stranger get out of his car in front of the building some fifteen minutes after Dr. Samuel Sears had driven away.

As the man walked toward him, the doorman thought of the difference between the cars of Dr. Sears and the newcomer. Sears drove an elegant cream-colored Bugatti convertible which the doorman admired because he knew cars, and the newcomer had a common modern American light car. The doorman was not impressed by the newcomer.

"You're the doorman here?" the stranger said.

"That's right. What can I do for you?"

The man, stocky and of average height and wearing a shabby brown suit, had a thick nose, full lips, and greying black hair. There was nothing prepossessing about him except a strong, jutting jaw. But the doorman sensed something about the man.

"Answer a few questions," the man said, and showed his wallet.

"Jefferson? Secret Service?" the doorman gulped.

"Right," Sears said in his disguise. "Tell me about Carla Van Beuren. Anything you noticed that night. Was she alone both going and coming?"

"Like I told the cops. She was alone. And it was her, no doubt. I

even spoke to her, and she answered."

"How about the elevator man?" Sears asked.

"I'll go get him. He happens to be on duty now."

The doorman led Sears into the lobby. The doorman had not recognized Sears at all. The elevator operator didn't either.

"No," the operator said, "I didn't see anyone with her. I said hello both times, and she gave me the same smile she always did, sort of half hiding that bad side of her face. She always did that."

"Did you see anyone suspicious anywhere around the building that day?"

"No," the elevator operator said.

The doorman thought. "Well, now that you mention it, I did see a car parked up the street for quite a time, you know? I mean, it wasn't a car I'd seen before. Big and black, like a limousine. Come to think of it, that car was there again later, after Miss Van Beuren come home."

"You didn't tell the police that."

"They never asked. I just remembered when you asked."

"Was there anything at all strange about Miss Van Beuren?"

"Strange?" the operator said.

"Odd, funny, unusual," Sears said. "Something about her appearance, her manner, her—"

"Eyes!" the doorman said. "Yeah, I remember now. Damn!

Only what's it mean? I mean, her eyes were kind of, well, funny."

"Hey, yeah," the elevator operator said, "I saw that, too. Kind of bright, her eyes, big."

"Slow focusing?" Sears asked. "Did she move just a little slowly, perhaps?"

"Gee," the elevator operator said, "I couldn't say about that."

The doorman shook his head. "I wouldn't know."

Sears asked a few more questions about any strangers the two men might have seen, but got nowhere. He also queried them about Aurora Heller, but they knew nothing against the girl, and were quite sure she had not returned from Boston at any time in the last two days until now.

As he walked back to his car, convinced that the "funny" eyes the doorman and elevator operator had noticed showed that Carla had been under the influence of something and someone, Sears noticed the black car. It was parked in the next block, half hidden in a service driveway.

He got into his car, started toward the black car, made a quick U-turn, and watched the rearview mirror. The black car came behind him.

He led the black car to the East River Drive and downtown to the Battery Tunnel. The black car made no attempt to gain until they were through the tunnel, and across Brooklyn to where the Belt

Parkway widened and the night traffic grew less.

Just as they passed the approaches to The Narrows Bridge, the black car suddenly began to pull up fast. Sears let it draw to within a few car lengths, but he could still not make out the faces in the front seat. Only that there were two faces, white and eager, watching him, and that the window on the passenger's side was open.

The muzzle of a submachine gun suddenly thrust out the opened window. The pale face behind it seemed to smile in anticipation of the kill.

Sears pressed his accelerator down to the floor. The special motor hidden under the ordinary hood of the inconspicuous light car responded with its powerful pick-up and tremendous speed. It leaped ahead and left the startled faces in the black car far behind in an instant.

The black car regained its balance and roared in pursuit, but the souped-up light car of Sears steadily pulled away in the long stretches of the Belt Parkway. He was a half a mile ahead as they passed Sheepshead Bay, a mile ahead at the point where the Belt split into Cross Island and Southern State.

Sears took the right fork into Southern State, and, the black car out of sight, pulled off at the first exit.

Sears made his way back to Manhattan through the city streets

and boulevards instead of the parkways. He did not see the black car again, but it was time to discard Walt Jefferson as a disguise.

XVIII

AURORA HELLER clung to his arm as Dr. Samuel Sears entered the lush penthouse apartment of Alexander Norman.

The party was in full swing in the enormous penthouse, in all the rooms and out on the terraces in the spring night.

A wild party, violent and decadent. Brilliant couples danced in the main living room to the violent music of a six-piece band. Sweat poured off the brows of the men in dinner jackets.

Two women in nothing but g-strings danced alone in a corner with a circle of men seated around them on the floor.

Three bearded men, and a girl in a sack, strummed guitars and a banjo in another corner with their own audience around them.

Aurora and Sears passed through the other rooms. In one of the smaller rooms a poker game was on, and a crap game in a corner where the rug had been thrown back.

In a third room people sat as if in a stupor, smoking brown marijuana cigarettes.

Couples sat nose to nose, or lounged entwined on couches, in all the rooms. Other people drank

and talked sedately as if they were at some quiet dinner party.

Here and there young men in dinner jackets leaned against the walls, alert and doing nothing but watching.

"Norman's storm troopers," Aurora said, nodding at the stern and muscular young men. "He's really quite the puritan, and only throws these parties as a cover. A little blackmail, too."

"Where is he?"

"Probably holding court on the terrace."

They went out onto the terrace. Sears saw the tall, spare figure of Alexander Norman seated on a chair in the center of a group. Four of his muscle men surrounded him. Most of the men in the group were important: Sears recognized six businessmen and two government officials.

Norman glanced up as they approached and saw Aurora Heller. A smile lighted his saturnine face. He waved to the girl, and then he saw Sears. His dark, cold eyes flashed. He jumped up and strode long-legged toward the surgeon.

"Samuel Sears! An honor, sir! I'm delighted to see you at one of my little affairs."

"Miss Heller was kind enough to bring me," Sears said.

"Then I owe Miss Heller my thanks. I've watched you and your work for some years, Dr. Sears, and I admire both. I'm sure you're not here to indulge in the *dolce*

vita. I hope you are here because of my work, my cause I might say. A man of your caliber would be a most welcome addition to my little force."

"Your force is hardly little, Mr. Norman, from what I hear," Sears said.

The millionaire's eyes glittered. "We're growing. People of this county are beginning to see the truth. We expand in numbers and power each day."

"Including buying electronics companies?" Sears said.

Norman's eyes darkened. He glanced at Aurora, and then back to Sears. He nodded slowly.

"I see, of course. Miss Heller is a friend of Carla Van Beuren, and you were about to operate on the unfortunate girl. Yes, I see why you're here now. Morris talked to me yesterday."

"You seem to know a lot about this," Sears said.

"I know a lot about everything that happens," Norman said. "I make it my business to know. In addition, the police have already talked to me."

"Carla didn't kill George Morris!" Aurora Heller burst out.

Norman nodded. "I quite agree. I don't think she did either. But I can offer very little else in the way of help but my unsupported opinion."

"What did Morris talk to you about yesterday?" Sears asked.

"My latest offer to buy. He

brought me word that Dane had turned it down."

"That didn't exactly please you."

"It didn't please me at all," Norman said, "and Morris was one of the men persuading Dane against selling. But I didn't kill him, or have him killed, if that's what you're thinking. He arrived at my office at one o'clock and he left at two, hale and hearty. And I can account for my time."

Sears seemed dejected. "No offense, Mr. Norman. It's just—well, I like Carla, and it looks so hopeless. I know Carla is innocent, but what can I do about it?"

"You're a surgeon. Stick to it," Norman said.

"I suppose you're right," Sears said lamely. He felt the pressure of Aurora Heller's hand on his arm, but he ignored it. He was playing the innocent role to lull everyone, and to evade any possible connection of himself, Sears, to Mr. Jones.

"Well I don't give up so easily!" Aurora said. "I'm not at all sure of you, Mr. Norman! I know how you operate! I know you really just want to get your hands on that detonator!"

Norman whirled on the girl. "Do you? You listen to me, Miss Heller. Stay out of my business! Hear me? Stay out if you know what's good for you!"

For a moment the beautiful girl and the millionaire stared at each

other. Then Sears cleared his throat.

"I'm sure Mr. Norman has explained himself to the police. I'm afraid poor Carla is the only logical suspect."

Aurora turned on him. "Maybe you are, Dr. Sears, but I'm not. I know she didn't kill George. Norman is probably lying, and I'd like to have a talk with those people at Carson Controls!"

"That won't be hard, my dear," Alexander Norman said. "It so happens that Carson's president, Ian Berg, is here tonight."

"That's a coincidence, isn't it?" Sears said.

"No," Norman said. "I expect Dane to be here, too. You see, Miss Heller is correct. I want that detonator, and there is no certainty that Dane Electronics will get the contract. It's still possible that Carson will get it. I intend to stay close to both."

Sears considered this. Norman was admitting freely that he wanted the detonator. Which made him seem innocent. But guilty men had used partial admissions to hide total guilt before this. The right-wing millionaire was working awfully hard to appear to have nothing to hide.

XIX

THEY FOUND Ian Berg watching the half-naked dancers. The rather stout president of Carson Con-

trols was staring so hard he did not notice them approach.

"Perhaps you had better talk to him, Aurora," Sears said. "I'd like to stay away from looking like a detective as much as possible."

"That was why the innocent act back with Norman?"

"Yes," Sears said. "But it's actually true. I don't know how to go about any of this. All I can do is try to collect as much information as I can for Mr. Jones."

"All right. I'll talk and you listen," Aurora agreed.

She approached Berg, who was very pleased to see her at first. The stout little president of Carson almost lost his teeth as he looked Aurora up and down. There was less to see than on the almost-naked dancers, but it was all closer and more personal, since Aurora was smiling at him.

Aurora introduced herself and stated her business, and Berg lost most of his pleasure in looking at her.

"What would I know about George Morris?" Berg said warily, and glanced at Sears.

"That's just what I told Miss Heller," Sears said.

"Listen to the man," Berg said to Aurora.

Aurora said, "I heard that you knew Dane Electronics had the inside track on the contract. You'd do a lot to get their data."

Berg took out a cigar. "I could have you arrested for that, young



lady. It's slander, and criminal."

"Arrest me," Aurora snapped.

Berg lighted his cigar. "Listen, lady. Don't cause me trouble. I've got enough. Morris was a spy on me anyway."

"A good motive," Aurora said.

"No," Berg said, smoking, "because he never got anything from us. And we never paid him to get stuff from Dane."

"Meaning you paid someone?"

Berg laughed now. "You dream, young lady."

Sears said quietly, "What time did Morris see you yesterday, Mr. Berg?"

"He come at three o'clock, a little after. He was late. He left maybe five o'clock."

"At three o'clock?" Sears said.

"You're sure?"

"Naturally I'm sure. Check with my secretary—look at her appointment pad. He came to see me," Berg said.

"How did he come? I mean, did he drive?"

"In a cab. I saw him out the window because he was late and I was getting mad."

"Thank you, Mr. Berg," Sears said. "We better go, Aurora."

He dragged the girl off. She went under protest. Sears found a small, empty bedroom. Aurora was angry.

"They're lying!"

"Lying or not, they're not going to tell us anything of their own free will," Sears said, "but they've told us something very important."

"They have?" Aurora said.

Sears nodded grimly. "They've told us that there is about an hour, between two o'clock and three o'clock unaccounted for in Morris's day. No one has mentioned that Morris visited anyone else yesterday. Maybe he did, and maybe that's our key."

"Our key?"

"Look, Aurora, the one thing that really stands out in this affair, besides the impersonation of Carla, is that there seems to be no reason for Morris to have been killed unless Carla did it. That hour could be the reason. Wait here. Don't talk to anyone. Mix and party it up. I'll be back."

Sears left the beautiful girl staring after him as he hurried out of the small bedroom, across the liv-

ing room, and out the front door. He rode down to the lobby of the plush apartment house. In the lobby he went straight to the pay telephone. He dialed the number of the apartment switchboard, and watched the operator plug in."

"Mr. Alexander Norman's penthouse, please," Sears said.

The phone was answered upstairs by one of the bully boys of Alexander Norman. He disguised his voice in a perfect imitation of Captain Murry Brian and asked for Norman, urgent police business.

Norman came on. "Yes, Brian?"

"Sorry to bother you Mr. Norman, but could you tell me how long it takes to get from your office to Carson Controls?"

"About ten minutes," he said. "Why?"

"I've run into some interesting facts. How did Morris leave your office?"

"How? I don't think I understand."

"Car, bus, taxi?"

"Oh, I see. In a taxi."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. He called the cab from my office. We don't have them cruising over in New Jersey."

"Thank you, that's fine. I'll be in touch," Sears said in Brian's voice and hung up. He grinned. That should keep Norman a little nervous.

He dialed the doorman's office at The Mayfair Towers. He asked if the man remembered how

George Morris had come home that night?"

"Home, sir? Well, let me see? He was early. About five o'clock, and that woman was with him. The redhead, Miss Steed, I believe."

"Fine. Now how did he arrive?"

"Yes," the doorman hesitated. "Well, I'd say by car. Yes, in a car. A big black car."

"Was that usual?"

"Well, I couldn't say. He often came in a taxi, and sometimes he was walking, and many times people did drive him home."

"All right. Thanks."

He hung up and thought about the ubiquitous black car. Then he dialed the home number of Maxwell Dane. He got Phyllis Dane. He identified himself as Walt Jefferson.

"Oooohhhh," the blonde Mrs. Dane cooed, "the man with muscles. What ever did you do to poor Wade? He came back in a terrible state."

"You shouldn't have sent him."

She giggled. "I know. I just love to see men fight, especially over me. Why don't you come around. I like winners."

"Did George Morris come round?"

She giggled again. "That goody goody? Never, he liked his little monster. Or I thought he did. I can't imagine why she killed him."

"If she did," Sears said. "Is your husband there?"

"Heavens, no. I'm alone, and don't worry about Maxwell."

"I won't," he said, and hung up.

He dialed Norman's apartment again and this time asked for Dane. The business man came to the telephone. Sears played the role of Jefferson again.

"Dane? Did Morris have any other appointments besides Berg and Norman yesterday afternoon?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did he return to your plant—say about two-ten?"

"No. As a matter of fact he never returned, and he was supposed to tell me what Norman had said."

"You mean you expected him, and he didn't show up?"

"Well, it wasn't definite. The morning would have done, but George usually returned if it was five or before. I was eager to hear his report."

Sears thanked Dane and hung up again. He lit a cigarette and thought. His cool eyes gleamed. A faint pattern was beginning to emerge. Not strong yet, but definitely there.

Morris had all but vanished for almost an hour. Whether that was significant or not, Morris had left Carson Controls and that was the last anyone had seen of him to speak to him before he died.

Morris had arrived home, with the Steed woman and in a big black car, earlier than usual. An hour later he had been shot by Carla Van Beuren, who claimed to have

been asleep, but who had not been asleep.

So, something had happened between the time he called on Norman at one o'clock, and the time he had arrived home with the Steed woman at five o'clock—and one hour was missing.

Where had Morris been for that hour?

And it looked like something had also happened to Morris between four o'clock when he left Carson Controls, and five o'clock when he arrived at The Mayfair Towers with Dolores Steed.

Maybe the missing hour was the key, and maybe it wasn't. Maybe Norman or Berg were the key. But something had happened yesterday afternoon.

If you believed Carla Van Beuren was guilty, then it all was very little, nothing for the police to use. But if you believed Carla innocent, then there was a suspicious pattern.

Sears returned upstairs to the party. Aurora Heller was waiting for him. She watched him.

"Well?"

"I don't know, Aurora. I reported to Mr. Jones. He seemed interested, even excited. But he said nothing can be done now until morning."

"Morning?" she said, and then she smiled. "But we have the whole night ahead, Samuel."

He grinned. "Yes, we do, don't we?"

She held his arm and her lips brushed his cheek.

He guided her slowly out of the party.

There really was nothing he could do until morning.

XX

THE OFFICE OF Alexander Norman was in a suburban office building on the outskirts of Newark. Parking lots surrounded the building, which Norman owned, and the entrance was a wide set of glass doors with a doorman on duty at a large desk.

"Yes sir?" the doorman said.

Sears presented himself as Monroe Farr, the ace feature writer for *Current Society Magazine*. The doorman seemed impressed by the tall, thin, dapper man in front of him.

"You know about the murder case of Mr. George Morris?" Sears aid.

"Terrible, sir. Just that afternoon..."

"I know, he was here. My magazine is investigating the case. Right now I'm tracing Morris's movements that day. There's a little something in it."

The doorman glanced around. "Yes sir?"

"Do you remember Morris leaving here?"

"I certainly do. He'd called a cab from Mr. Norman's private office. When the driver arrived, I called

up. Mr. Morris came down in Mr. Norman's private elevator."

"You remember the taxi?"

"Yellow Circle Company," the doorman said promptly. "I've seen the driver before. A little guy—wears a leather jacket and a cap."

"Did you hear Morris give his destination?"

"Carson Controls."

"You're sure?"

"Absolutely. Mr. Morris told the driver right here on the steps. Carson Controls. That's only about ten minutes away."

"Yes," Sears said. "Thanks."

He gave the doorman ten dollars. The doorman smiled. Sears got into his own taxi.

Carson Controls was a series of low buildings behind a high cyclone fence. Two guards in uniform were at the gate. Sears introduced himself as Monroe Farr. The guards were less impressed than the doorman had been. He decided on a different appeal than money.

"We're going to do a feature on the case—beauty and beast type of angle. It's open and shut, but we want to trace Morris's movements. You know—his steps on the fatal day, all unaware of the death that awaited him."

"Yes, sir?" one guard said.

"What do you want here, sir? Have you an appointment with Mr. Berg?" the second guard said.

"I talked to Mr. Berg last night," he said. "No, I'm just after some color. Maybe the taxi driver who



drove him last, all that. As a matter of fact, if I learn what I need here, I think I'll use pictures of the gate, and you two, of course."

"Pictures of us?" the second guard said.

"What do you want to know?"

"He did arrive in a taxi?" Sears said.

"That's right. A Yellow Circle," the first guard said.

"Joe Taranto was the driver. Little guy. Drives people here from Newark a lot," the second guard said.

"That was about two-ten?"

"No, more like three-ten."

"Yeah," the first guard agreed. "About three-ten. Here. We punched him in."

The guard displayed the sign-in record of two days ago. Morris had checked in at 3:10. Sears took a picture of the guard and the page with a miniature camera. The guards could see themselves in *Current Society* already.

"You're sure of the driver?"

"Hell, yes. Morris made him wait. Joe didn't like it. We talked a while," the second guard said.

Sears took his picture. The guards beamed. They would tell him almost anything now.

"Then he left in the same taxi?"

"Sure did, about four o'clock P.M."

"That's right. I heard him tell Taranto to take him back to Dane Electronics."

"Did either of you happen to see a big black car?"

They both shook their heads.

"Good, and thanks," and he took their picture once more.

The garage of The Yellow Circle Cab Company was in a slummy section of Newark. As Sears drove up he sensed at once that something was not normal at The Yellow Circle.

Men walked around in the garage in good suits. They all looked uncomfortable. Too many cabs were in the garage. Too many men were in the office. Voices were too low and muted in the dim interior of the garage.

Sears as Monroe Farr asked for the dispatcher's office. He was directed to a glassed-in cubicle where

a small, sallow man in a cheap grey suit sat idly.

"Yeah?" the sallow man said.

"What's going on around here?"

"Funeral. We're all goin'. The boss is steaming 'cause the cabs are off the street. Five minutes after we bury him, we all roll. Some boss."

"Whose funeral?" he asked, but he had a pretty good idea of the answer.

"One of the drivers. Joe Taranto."

"Too bad," Sears said. "When did he die?"

"Wednesday," the sallow man said, and then eyed him with growing suspicion. "What can I do for you, buddy?"

"I came looking for a driver who picked up a fare at Alexander Norman's office building and delivered him to Carson Controls. The driver then waited, and took the party away from Carson."

"You a cop?"

"Reporter. I'm on a story. I want to know where the driver took his fare."

"You want to know a lot," the sallow man said, and eyed Sears up and down. "What rag you from?"

"Current Society Magazine."

The small man arched a brow and whistled between his teeth. "That's a pretty big magazine, chum. I mean—"

"If I get what I want, you'll get what you want," Sears said.

"Fair enough, Mr. Farr." the sallow man agreed. "No trouble. I'll

just check the sheets. You happen to know the driver's name?"

"Joe Taranto."

The sallow little man stopped halfway out of his chair. Slowly he looked at Sears and his mouth came open. Then his mouth closed, and he slowly subsided into his chair. He stared at Sears for a full minute. When he spoke his voice had an edge like a razor.

"Joe was killed when his cab crashed off the skyway. It burned. His trip sheets burned. Joe never had an accident before. He crashed about four-fifteen P.M. on Wednesday. Now you want to know about a fare Joe had on Wednesday?"

"That's right."

"We all figured something's funny about that accident. I think maybe you better talk to the cops, eh?"

"No, I think not. There's nothing I could tell them now."

"Let's find out," the small man said, and reached for the telephone.

Sears reached out and caught the sallow little man on the neck. He lapsed in the chair and lay still. Sears walked quietly from the garage.

XXI

AURORA HELLER sat up in her bed and looked at Sears. The surgeon paced the room. Aurora wore a sheer blue nightgown that hid no part of her fine body, but she seemed unaware of that now.

"Dead?" Aurora said. "The taxi driver?"

"At four-fifteen P.M. on Wednesday," Sears said. "You understand? Between the time Morris left Carson Controls in that taxi, and the time he showed up at The Mayfair Towers with Dolores Steed, something happened to him, and the taxi driver was killed—and his trip sheet destroyed."

"Someone wanted to hide what Morris had been doing that day."

"Exactly. Now it's a matter of record that he went to Carson Controls and Alexander Norman, so why destroy the trip sheet? No, it must be that missing hour. Where did Morris go and why?"

"Unless," Aurora said slowly, "the driver was killed because he saw someone do something to Morris after four o'clock P.M. In that case it could be Berg or Norman. Maybe one of them had him followed, and grabbed him after he left Carson Controls. Maybe the driver was killed only because he was a witness."

Sears nodded. "Yes, that's what Mr. Jones said. And with the driver dead Mr. Jones is stumped. Unless—"

Sears let the sentence hang in the air. Aurora looked at him. Her fine body was tense under the sheer nightgown.

"Unless?" she said.

Sears paced the room. "Mr. Jones has a plan. I don't like it very much, but he thinks it's the only

way. He wants to flush the killer out. It's dangerous, and I can't help."

"You mean dangerous for me?" Aurora said quietly.

"Yes."

"If it helps Carla, then I don't care," the girl said. "What is the plan?"

"I don't know in detail. One of Mr. Jones's men will tell you if you agree. But the idea is that the killer seems to know a lot about Carla and Morris, but maybe not quite all. For some reason, Mr. Jones thinks that the killer is nervous. He thinks that if he can make the killer think that you know something, the killer will try to get you."

"All right. If it exposes the killer I'm ready. Who is the man who will contact me?"

"All I know is that he will call himself Monroe Farr. So that you'll be sure who he is, he'll show you this earring," and Sears picked an earring from Aurora's jewel box. "Only I could have given it to him."

"When?"

"Tonight."

The beautiful girl nodded, and her eyes watched Sears.

An hour later Sam Sears as Monroe Farr stepped into Aurora Heller's living room and handed the girl the earring. She took it, and studied him.

Behind his disguise Dr. Sears waited to see if the girl would discover his true identity. She did not. The disguise was too good.

"Mr. Farr," she said. "I'm ready."

"All right, Miss Heller," Sears said. "The plan is really quite simple. Mr. Jones believes in simplicity when it is possible. Whoever killed George Morris is clever, organized, and dangerous. The police have nothing they can work on, and it's obvious that our killer is someone who must protect his identity at all costs."

"You feel it's an organization?"

"It has to be. Too much was done too precisely in too many places for any one man to be behind it. I think that George Morris became involved in something during the missing hour, and he was killed to silence him. That means our killer must be someone with a secret of dangerous proportions."

"Yes, I see," Aurora said, and the girl, dressed now in a severe black suit that made her even more beautiful, watched him. "You're not an associate of Mr. Jones, are you? You are Mr. Jones? The Man Of A Million Faces!"

He nodded. "Yes, I am Mr. Jones. Even Dr. Sears does not know this, or who I really am. It must be that way."

"I understand," Aurora said.

"Very well. Now here is what I want you to do . . ."

XXII

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, Aurora Heller picked up the telephone in

her apartment. She dialed a secret number. A low, quiet voice answered: "Mr. Jones speaking."

"Mr. Jones?" Aurora Heller said, "I have something I have to tell you. I don't know what it means exactly, but I'm sure it will prove that Carla Van Beuren did not kill George Morris."

"Go on, Miss Heller," the low voice of Mr. Jones said.

"I returned home only yesterday, Mr. Jones, and I found some odd things in my apartment. A small hole drilled beneath my bedroom window, for instance. But more important, I found a message from George Morris!"

"A message?" Mr. Jones's quiet voice said quickly.

"Yes. I don't understand it, but it was apparently meant for Carla. It came from Carson Controls by ordinary mail, so hadn't been delivered until yesterday. Apparently George sent it to Carla before he left Carson."

"All right, Miss Heller. Wait there. I'll be with you in fifteen minutes!"

Mr. Jones hung up, and Aurora slowly replaced her receiver on its cradle. Then she went into her bedroom. The bedroom was dark. When the lights went on, Aurora Heller was seated in a chair with her back to the window.

Five minutes passed.

Then, faintly, there was sound and movement on the ledge outside the bedroom window. Aurora



Heller did not move in her chair, apparently absorbed in what she was studying in her lap.

A shadow on the fire escape.

The shattering of glass.

Only the sound of the window shattering, and, a split second before, a faint spitting sound like the crack of a whip.

Aurora Heller fell face forward from her chair.

The whip-like sound of the silenced pistol spat twice more and on the floor Aurora Heller jerked under the impact of the bullets.

The figure on the ledge vanished.

On a side street below the window of Aurora Heller's apartment, a shadowy figure ran to a long black limousine. The door of the car opened and the man jumped in. The driver drove off.

A block away a small, light

American car also drove off. In it, Samuel Sears, still disguised as Monroe Farr, watched a large oscilloscope type screen set on the seat beside him.

Small blips appeared at regular intervals on the screen.

From time to time the blips moved sharply to the left and right of a center line, and Sears turned his car until the blips centered again.

Watching the screen, and turning as indicated, Sears followed the black car out of sight. The homing device that produced the blips, the device he had crawled up and planted on the black car in the dark night while the killer had been on the fire escape, was his own development and had a range of over a mile.

The black car led him across the city and through the Lincoln Tunnel into New Jersey. He climbed the curve of the Palisades and came out on the long straight road across the Jersey Flats.

The black car turned sharply north toward Newark.

Sears followed in his light car with the special motor. He had no difficulty keeping the black car within range of his homing device.

The blips stopped and held steady as Sears drove carefully into the heart of downtown Newark. He drove cautiously ahead until he spotted the black car stopped at the dark side of a tall office building. Three men were just getting out.

They went into the building through a side entrance.

Sears slipped from his car and crossed swiftly and silently to the side entrance of the tall office building.

XXIII

THE THREE MEN stood in the semi-darkness of the building basement and waited before the unmarked door. Two of them stood a step behind the third. None of them heard the soft steps of the shadowy figure that slid silently into the basement behind them.

The man a step in front of the others lit a cigarette. It was the same man Sears had seen in the parked car when the two men had tried to kill him. The man with the face of the dead Nick Remuda, bank robber.

The unmarked door opened to reveal a small elevator. The three men stepped inside and faced front in silence. The doors closed.

From the shadows of the basement Sears crossed quickly to the door and listened. The sound of the elevator went on for some time, then stopped. Far above the door opened, closed, and then silence. The elevator did not descend.

Sears examined the wall outside the door. He could find no way of bringing the elevator down. It was clear that it was operated only from somewhere else, and that the three men must have contacted someone

above somehow, probably from the black car.

He set down a small, black case he was carrying, and took a special jimmy from his pocket. He forced open the elevator door. A floor below the shaft ended in the usual wheels and bumper. Above he could see only cables reaching up into darkness. He hooked his black case to his belt, swung out on the cables, and began a slow hand-over-hand ascent.

All the way up there was nothing but sheer, blank walls on all sides. The elevator was a private elevator that opened on only one floor—the final floor, far above.

From time to time Sears swung toward the walls and rested by plowing his feet in depressions in the masonry. At last he reached the underside of the car. The access trap door was directly above him. He listened.

There was no sound above. Cautiously, with a single glance at the yawning hole beneath him, he pushed open the trap door. The car was empty; the doors were closed. He hoisted himself up into the car and crouched, listening.

Nothing seemed to move beyond the closed door of the car. He drew a small, deadly pistol and approached the door. The controls inside the car were limited to *Open*, *Close*, *Up and Down*. He pressed the *Open* button. The door slid open.

A dark corridor stretched before

him. He slid out, closed the door behind him, and listened again in the dark hall. Far off somewhere he heard voices. He looked around. The corridor did not look like a normal office building corridor. It was too dark, too unfinished. Some sort of secret section of the building—like a hidden complex behind regular corridors and offices.

His pistol ready, he moved along the corridor toward the sound of voices. Light came from beneath a door at the far end of the corridor. Sears moved toward it, and the door opened!

Sears flattened back against the corridor wall. A man came out of the lighted room. It was one of the two men he had seen below with the man who looked like Nick Remuda. The man came along the corridor toward Sears.

The man went into a doorway before he reached Sears. The disguised surgeon glided into the room behind the man. It was a storeroom. The man, oblivious to the open door behind him, was selecting pistols. Sears closed the door softly. The man turned. Sears held a pistol pointed at the man.

"Talk," Sears said.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" the man cried in a deep, gruff voice.

"Splendid," Sears said, when he heard the voice, and he had heard just enough to be able to imitate it.

He stepped to the man and hit him once with the pistol. He bent

and drugged the man with a needle from his black case. Then he took out his make-up kit and mirror and worked on his face.

When he stepped out he was disguised as the man. With the guns, he walked boldly to the door with the light under it. As Sears put his hand on the knob, he took a deep breath. He went in.

The man who looked like Nick Remuda glanced up from where he stood at the head of a long table. "You took your time, Max. Put 'em on the table and sit down."

Sears nodded, placed the guns on the table, and took a seat somewhat behind all the others. They looked at him once, and then turned their attention back to Remuda.

Suddenly, Sears had no doubt that the man at the head of the table was Nick Remuda. A dead bank robber who was not dead.

"All right, now let's go over it again," Remuda snapped.

Sears watched the whole scene. There were four other people in the room besides himself and Remuda. One was the ice-pick man he had knocked out earlier. Another was the man who had shot at Aurora Heller. The third was a small, dark woman who seemed vaguely familiar to Sears. The fourth was a tall, stooped old man who was also familiar.

The name of the tall, older man clicked into his mind: Big Ed Masters! Con-man and expert getaway-car driver. And Big Ed Masters had

died six months ago in the fiery wreck of a car—or that was what the official report said.

Sears had no more time to consider what this might mean. Nick Remuda, alive, was talking:

"The target's the Chase Bank. The armored truck delivered the special shipment today—a million dollars! All we have to get through is—" Remuda pulled down a large detail floor plan of the bank. Sears watched and listened. Remuda went over a well-planned, meticulous bank robbery scheme down to the last detail.

It was sure, neat, professional work, with each member of the team having a precise series of jobs. Years of training and practice had gone into Remuda's planning, but there was something peculiar about the way he was talking now. As if he had no real interest in the job.

"Okay, then that's it. We move out in twenty minutes. My end of it's all yours. The rest is up to the boss. Once we get out of the bank, he takes over for the getaway. All you got to do is get safe to the trucks that'll bring you back here."

"How does he get us out of here?" Big Ed Masters asked.

"That's his business, Ed," Remuda said. "He's got the ways, and the cover. He ain't never failed yet. That's why we had to take care of that Morris guy. No slips, not even a chance of a slip, that's how the boss works."

"Yeah," one of the other men

said, "only how come he gets all the loot?"

"He gets the loot, stupid, and you get safe. That's the way it is. It's cheap at the price, and don't you forget it. The boss knows what he's doing."

Sears never heard the door open. Part of the wall of the room slid silently, and through it Sears saw an elegant, yet restrained office. But he did not look long at the office. He looked at the man who stepped through the sliding door, and spoke:

"Thank you, Mr. Remuda. Yes, I know what I'm doing, and that is why you are all quite safe. The Heller woman has been killed, and there is nothing more to worry about from Mr. Morris's unfortunate observation."

Sears, as the hoodlum Max, kept his face impassive as he looked at the giant, white-haired figure of Jasper Magruder!

XXIV.

JASPER MAGRUDER strode into the room and the secret door from his office closed silently behind him. The giant lawyer and philanthropist stood beside Nick Remuda at the head of the table.

"I know you are all concerned that the job on the Chase Bank might have to have been abandoned, but all is well now. Morris is silenced, the Van Beuren girl will be quietly committed to a



mental hospital, and both the taxi driver and the Heller woman can cause us no trouble."

"You're sure, Magruder?" Nick Remuda said.

Magruder smiled. "Quite sure, Mr. Remuda. As Miss Van Beur-en's attorney, I can guarantee that she will think herself guilty, and will be committed. Nothing that Morris learned can possibly get out now."

"You've got the getaway set?" Big Ed Masters asked.

"I always have it set, Mr. Masters. All you have to do is do your job, and bring me the half a million dollars from that bank. You

will get a small cut, and your complete future safety."

Remuda looked at his watch. "Okay, then we go. Max, you and Dave take the big car. I'll take the panel truck. Big Ed drives the getaway car and takes Miss Angie."

They all nodded, including Sears. Magruder beamed at them all.

"Good luck, gentlemen, and lady," the giant lawyer said.

They all took a gun from the pile on the table. Sears held back until only one gun was left. Then he led the way to the private elevator. No one spoke on the way down.

In the basement they filed out to the cars. The black car stood where it had parked. Now there was a panel truck and a large grey car with twin-carburetors—the getaway car.

Sears got into the black car beside the man who had shot at Aurora, and who was named Dave. The rest got into their cars. Dave drove off first.

All the way back into the city Sears was silent. Dave concentrated on his driving. After Lincoln Tunnel the three vehicles suddenly split up on different routes. The moment the black car was alone, Sears drew his gun.

"Pull it over, Dave," he said.

The hoodlum at the wheel slowly turned his head.

"What?"

"I said pull over. Now."

The man blinked. "You ain't Max."

"Pull it over, Dave!"

The hoodlum pulled the big car to the curb, reached for the hand brake, and came up with a gun in his hand.

Sears shot first. The hoodlum slammed back against the door, and fell forward with his head in Sears's lap.

Sears slid out from under the heavy man. A telephone booth was just up the street. He hurried to the booth and dialed. A sleepy voice answered:

"Commissioner's Squad, Sergeant Maul speaking."

Sears whispered in the voice of Mr. Jones, "Captain Brian, urgent."

There was some clicking. Then, "Brian. Who's this?"

"Mr. Jones, Captain," he whispered in his low voice. "There will be a bank robbery at the Chase Bank. You will find four of the gang at the bank. The fifth is in the street at Twenty-Fourth and Tenth Avenue."

"How do you . . ."

"I have my ways, Captain, as you know," he said quietly. "I suggest you hurry before they miss their fifth member. And, Captain, two of the men are Nick Remuda and Big Ed Masters. Don't be surprised."

He hung up. He went back to the black car and dumped the dead Dave into the gutter. Then he got

behind the wheel and turned back for Newark.

Sears left the car in the alley, and made his way back up to the hidden rooms behind the offices of Jasper Magruder. The private elevator jimmied easily again, and the car was down where they had left it. He rode up.

He stepped out into the dark corridor, his pistol ready. Nothing moved in the corridor. The elevator had come up silently. There was light ahead from under the door where the robbery had been planned. Sears, still disguised as Max, moved ahead.

He looked into the store room. The real Max was still where he had left him, drugged and unconscious.

At the door into the conference room Sears hesitated, then quickly opened the door and stepped in. The room was empty.

He crossed to the sliding panel and looked for a release mechanism. There was none. The door did not operate from this side. He studied the hairline crack in the wall. He could jimmy it, but not without noise, and there was no way of knowing who was in Magruder's office.

He considered the problem. From the discussion of the getaway, Magruder would be waiting for his gang to return. It might be safer to go down and around to the offices of The Magruder Foundation on the other side of . . .

The sliding panel began to hum. A motor had started. Sears jumped back into the shadows of the room.

The door opened and Jasper Magruder came through, looking at his watch. Suddenly, the giant lawyer sensed someone behind him, and whirled, his white hair catching the light.

"Max?" Magruder said. "What are you doing—"

Sears stepped out into the light, his pistol aimed at the white-haired lawyer-philanthropist.

"Not Max, Mr. Magruder," Sears whispered.

Magruder stared. "Not Max? Then . . . a remarkable disguise. Really remarkable! Who the devil are you?"

"I'm called Mr. Jones, Magruder, and I know how you killed George Morris, and why."

"Jones?" Magruder said, frowned. "Ah, of course! The Man Of A Million Faces. I thought you were some kind of joke invented by the police. I see I was wrong. I gather, since you're here disguised as Max, that the robbery has failed. I expect Remuda and the others are in custody?"

"They are by now, and you will be soon."

"Of course, of course," Magruder said, mused. "I must take serious measures, I see. They won't talk right away, but soon they will if I don't extricate them from. . ."

Sears stood where he could watch Magruder and both doors.

There was a third door he had not discovered. He heard the soft steps a second too late.

Something crashed against his skull, and he went out.

XXV

SAM SEARS opened his eyes and saw the smiling face of Dolores Steed. The beautiful redhead wore a skin-tight pair of black coveralls. It did nothing to hide her feminine curves.

"Mr. Sears, welcome back," the redhead said. "Or should I say Mr. Jones."

Sears reached up and touched his face. His disguise was gone. All the surgical tricks he used to thicken his features, change the shapes of his face, had been deftly removed. The voice of Jasper Magruder chuckled to his left.

"You know, Dr. Sears, I have long wondered about you. I am shamefaced to admit that I considered you something of a lightweight, a playboy. I see now that that is a clever ruse you employ to divert attention from your dual life as Mr. Jones."

Sears saw that he was in the silent public office of Magruder in the Magruder Foundation suite of offices. The clock on the desk read 4:10, and it was dark outside. He looked at Magruder and the beautiful redhead.

"What did Morris do? Come to see you on some sudden whim,

and observe something he shouldn't have?" Sears asked.

"I'm afraid that is exactly what he did. He came up to discuss a threat Norman had made. He came unannounced, and my poor idiot of a secretary, knowing I did work for Dane Electronics, allowed him to come in here."

Magruder shrugged. "Through an idiotic lapse on my own part, I had the plans to the Chase Bank on my desk. We are all fallible, alas. A stupid mistake. Morris saw the plans, and the name of the bank."

"Not dangerous then," Sears said, "but when the bank was robbed today, a smart man like Morris would maybe remember what he had seen."

Magruder nodded. "He might not have, and probably wouldn't have remembered; but I can take no chances. It was enough that he might have remembered. He had to be silenced and quickly."

"You moved fast, and you have a good organization."

"I like to think so," Magruder said.

"So you had him kidnaped from that taxi, and you killed the driver."

"We had to, of course. Not only had the driver witnessed our taking of Morris, but he also knew Morris had been here. I was quite sure the driver was the only one who knew. Until Miss Heller called you tonight. Naturally, I had to kill her,

too. I regret that. Such a lovely lady!"

"After you had Morris, you drugged and hypnotized him, and then sent him home with Miss Steed," Sears said. "You busily built up a fake romance between Morris and Miss Steed. Then you found Carla Van Beuren and drugged her with gas through that hole under the window."

"It was a stroke of genius to think up the plan to use Miss Van Beuren, if I say so myself. I am a rather good hypnotist, and once we had her drugged, it was simple to make her leave the apartment with a post hypnotic suggestion."

"Your men picked her up in the car and just drove her around while one of your gang disguised herself as Carla and killed Morris."

"Exactly. Really a simple plan, when you consider that we had both of them under our control. It is always best to give the police a prime suspect rather than a mystery. It was easy to make Miss Van Beuren forget she had ever left her apartment once she came out of the hypnosis. There was no doubt that she would be declared guilty and committed for insanity."

Dolores Steed said, "Until he came along. I didn't like that visit from the Secret Service man at all."

"So you whistled up your killers."

Magruder nodded. "She did, but you proved too clever. I should

have realized then that you were more than a secret service man. However, all's well that ends well, eh?"

There was a silence in the office. Sears held out his hand.

"May I have a cigarette?"

"Of course," Magruder said. "We're only waiting to be sure that my people have been arrested. When I'm sure, I shall have to arrange to free them quickly, or kill them. At the same time, to be safe, I shall prepare my escape. I've helped many criminals to escape, now it may be my turn. Ah, well."

Sears smoked.

"Why?" he said. "What was it all for? Why become the leader of a robbery gang?"

"Why? Money, of course. The foundation! And myself. You see, Dr. Sears, The Magruder Foundation spends a great deal of money in its good work. I couldn't face it coming to an end. My own fortune was lost, I'm afraid, and not many people are really interested in a legal foundation to help criminals as well as the poor and needy."

"I based my life on the principle of equal justice for all. It had to continue! When I lost my own money, and contributions were far too small and too slow, why I had this idea! You see, I had met many criminals in my day, and they all had one great dream—the escape, go scot free."

"So I worked out this plan to help them do just that, escape

abroad with my help, and change themselves so as never to be recognized. I had all the facilities with the foundation's far-flung offices and contacts among police and criminals. It was really simple—and they paid me with one last big job!"

Sears nodded slowly. "With most of the loot going to you, and being listed on the foundation's books as a donation!"

"Anonymous, of course," Magruder said, and laughed. "Who would question the books of a philanthropic foundation? You see, that has always been a major problem of thieves—how to spend the money without being noticed. My foundation could spend all it wanted without attracting attention. Naturally, I also paid myself a generous salary!"

"Since the donors wanted to be anonymous, according to your story, even the tax people wouldn't suspect. The gifts were not declared."

"Exactly. A very good scheme if I say so myself, and the foundation had all the money it needed."

"And a lot of dangerous criminals walked away free with your help!" Sears said.

"There are always criminals, Dr. Sears. I allowed a few guilty to go free, so that my foundation could save many, many innocent."

"A noble idea," Sears said, "that ended in murder."

"Alas, how true. I regret that,

and what must happen now to Miss Van Beuren, and what must happen to you. But you see that I cannot allow you to live. In the event that I am discovered as being the criminal mastermind, I can flee. I know where I can go in open safety—but if I were branded a murderer, I could not escape. No, you have to die. You know about George Morris."

"And you'll let Carla be put away as a killer?"

"I have no choice," Magruder said.

The giant lawyer stood up. Dolores Steed drew a pistol. The gun had a silencer on it. The red-head came close to Sears. He drew deeply on his cigarette. A voice suddenly commanded:

"No one move! This is the police!"

The voice came from the doorway behind Magruder. The giant lawyer stared at Sears who stood smoking, and blowing deep blue-white smoke. Both Magruder and Dolores Steed whirled to the door.

There was no one at the door.

Sears leaped on the Steed woman. He had her, had the gun, and she struggled in his steel grip.

Magruder had a gun. The lawyer's shots rang out like hammer blows in the silent office.

Dolores Steed screamed. A horrible, dying scream.

Sears fired, the spit of the girl's silenced pistol like the buzz of an angry wasp.

Magruder was gone through the office door.

Sears laid the girl down. There was nothing he could do. His trick of ventriloquism had fooled them because of his special ability to do it while smoking. Magruder had shot. The girl, hit twice, was dead.

He left Dolores Steed on the floor of the office and ran out.

XXVI

IN THE SILENCE of the building he heard the footsteps of Jasper Magruder running up the stairs toward the roof.

Grimly, Sears started up the stairs in pursuit. At this hour the elevators were not operating, and there was no other way up. At each floor he tested the doors, stopped and listened. The doors were all locked on the inside, and the footsteps went on above him.

He reached the floor just below the roof.

Above him now there was only silence.

Far below, and far off, the sirens of police cars were growing in the night. The bank robbers must have talked, Sears realized. The police would arrive any minute. But perhaps not in time to take Magruder.

Sears climbed silently to the roof exit and went out. A faint line of dawn tinged the eastern sky across the odorous flats. Sears crouched low and moved out across the roof of the tall building.

Ventilators and the tops of the elevator shafts jutted up in the darkness. There were no other roofs close enough for a man to jump to. Sears edged from cover to cover on the vast roof.

A shot exploded in the night.

The bullet sang off the ventilator behind which Sears crouched.

He saw a shadow run heavily toward the motor housing of an elevator shaft. He fired, and the shadow lurched heavily and fell behind the housing.

The stalking game went on, grim and silent.

Slowly, with care and an occasional shot, Sears worked the giant lawyer back toward the edge of the roof away from the elevator housings which he might have hoped to use to escape.

Desperately Magruder tried to force his way back toward the stairs down, or kill Sears, but the surgeon-detective blocked every move and every attempt.

At last the voices of the police could be heard below. Sears closed in. Magruder suddenly stood up on the edge of the roof. He held his pistol and teetered on the edge. Sears stopped.

"No further, Dr. Sears."

"I'm taking you in, Magruder."

"To save the little girl with the grotesque face?"

"Yes," Sears said.

"Yes, of course," Magruder said. "But is she really that important? A deal, Dr. Sears. I have, in

places only I know, ten million dollars. Half is yours to turn your back, to allow me to escape, to tell the police you could not find me."

"No deal, Magruder."

"Five million, Dr. Sears. Think of the good work you could do with that. Think of all the grotesque faces you could make beautiful with that."

"No," Sears said. "I might get to like the power of money too much, and that is no good no matter how much good I did with it."

Magruder nodded. "Of course, I see. The good moralist to the end, eh? Ah well, I've had a good life, and I have done good work."

Magruder smiled, placed his pistol in his mouth, and fired. The force of the shot hurled the giant lawyer over the edge. Sears ran to the edge to see the last faint trace of the white hair fading into the darkness below.

Then he turned and went down from the roof. He did not want the Newark police to see Samuel Sears where Mr. Jones should have been.

IN THE BIG office of Commissioner Angelo Pinto, Samuel Sears sat and watched the peppery little commissioner. Pinto sat behind his desk toying with the .45 automatic that had been the murder weapon.

"Mr. Jones did it again, Sam," Pinto said, "and I get the credit."

"I'm not in this for the credit, Angelo. I couldn't do the work for long if I were known."

"I know," Pinto agreed, "and it makes me look good. I don't care for myself, but at least I know we have an honest police force as long as I'm here."

"We all know that," Sears said.

Pinto nodded quietly. "Remuda wouldn't talk, of course, but we've got ten charges against him anyway. It was the woman who told us the whole story. She impersonated Carla Van Beuren, of course, and confirmed your whole analysis of the scheme. Miss Van Beuren is free to go."

Sears remembered then what had been so familiar about the small, dark woman member of the gang he had seen in the conference room—she had looked vaguely like Carla Van Beuren.

"Magruder himself was the hypnotist," Pinto went on, "and the gang had an expert make-up man for the disguises. We have Magruder's records. It was a big operation, Magruder had been spiriting wanted men out of the country for years, and plowing the proceeds of hundreds of robberies into his foundation."

"And all George Morris did was accidentally see the plans for the robbery of the Chase Bank," Sears said. "A momentary quirk of chance. A lot of people died for that tiny accident."

"But the gang's broken," Pinto said. "Magruder won't harm anyone else."

"Or help anyone else. It's

strange, Angelo, but he actually did a lot of good with his foundation. We live in a strange world."

"Yes, Samuel. The others are all clear, of course. What the devil was that Phyllis Dane up to?"

Sears laughed. "Nothing at all. Just playing games, as her husband said. She likes to stir Dane up, and she likes to chase men. I was elected to be chased."

"But never caught, Sam?"

"Not yet," Sears said with a smile. "And if not yet, then I should be home free as the perennial bachelor."

"Perhaps, Sammy, but don't bet on it. As a matter of fact, I promised someone to shoo you out of here at exactly 3 P.M. That was a neat trick you pulled with that dummy of the girl. Now go and see how you can do with the real thing."

Sears walked out of the commissioner's office and took the elevator down. In the sunny street in

front of Headquarters, Aurora Heller sat in his cream-colored Bugatti.

"Hello, Dr. Sears."

"Hello, Aurora, I'm glad it was only a dummy they shot."

"Are you? Then I'll have to make you regret it. Hop in and drive me to some fantastic pleasure palace."

Sears shook his head. "No, Aurora. I have to operate in a few hours. Carla doesn't want to put her new face off any longer. She's waited long enough."

"All right," Aurora Heller said. "Today you operate. Tonight, I operate on you. I'm as good a surgeon my way as you are in your way."

"Are you, Aurora?"

"Tonight we'll find out, won't we?" she said.

Smiling, Samuel Sears got into the Bugatti beside her and drove off with her green eyes watching him.

Next Issue—Another Incredible TRUE CRIME Story

JOHN DILLINGER: ROBBER, RAIDER, RENEGADE

The True Story of the World's Worst Killer

by DAVID MAZROFF

Hunger was king and the devil his master, when a lady-loving, cop-hating punk named John Dillinger moved in to the crime ring—to stay! Depression spawned, he and his hoodlum band looted and killed and mocked at justice. No one since Jesse James had rivaled his ruthless deadliness. Then, one night, with a lady in red . . .

THE DEADLY ART

by ROBERT COLBY

*The voice over the phone was guarded.
"A hundred grand we want. And don't set
up any games with the cops. Or Lover-
girl won't be coming home to you—ever!"*

ON A TUESDAY night in late spring, Vincent Grover Dillman was driven off to a local theater by his chauffeur. He was enroute to witness another heavyweight championship bout over closed-circuit TV.

He had been gone less than a minute when a dark sedan which had been idling in the shadows down the block, circled the Dillman driveway and paused before the mansion.

Two men alighted and moved boldly to the front door. At this moment, there was only one servant in the house, a butler who sat reading in his room off the kitchen, while savoring a glass of rare imported wine from the Dillman private stock.

Upstairs, Mrs. Andrea Dillman

was preparing to make a hasty exit, for there was little time, and she had a date with her lover at a secret rendezvous.

The butler, after a swift adjustment of his dress and manner to the proper dignity, answered the door chime. Though the men were strangers, they were carefully groomed, wearing dark business suits in good taste. The butler told the gentlemen politely that he would see if Mrs. Dillman were in, and asked for their names.

The taller of the two men, pretending to reach for his card, produced a .45 automatic and ordered the butler to lead them to Mrs. Dillman.

Andrea Dillman was seated before a vanity mirror when the trio entered her bedroom unan-



nounced. In her mid-thirties, she was a slender, attractive woman who had a soft face and hard gray eyes.

She turned from adjusting a white, turban-style hat which crowned her ebony hair. Slowly,

her pretty mouth came undone with surprise.

While one of the men explained that she would be taking a trip of uncertain duration, the other tied up the butler with a coil of wire which he brought from his pocket.

When Andrea began to vocalize her rebellion loudly, the man with the gun slapped her viciously and threatened to spoil the continuity of her teeth. She subsided quickly and a gag was placed in her mouth. Then she was blindfolded, her hands were bound.

To the butler, the tall man said, "When Dillman comes home, you tell him we'll phone him tomorrow night at seven sharp. We want a

hundred thousand in small, used bills ready to deliver. No money, no wife." He made a slit-throat gesture. "If there's even a whiff of cops being called in, she dies. Understand?"

The butler nodded furiously. The two men marched Andrea down to their car. One of the men got in back and held her on the floor; the other drove away.

Vincent Dillman arrived home shortly before midnight. He made himself a nightcap, then went upstairs, where he discovered the butler tightly secured to a leg of his wife's dresser. Released, the butler massaged his wrists and unfolded his story.

Dillman, a man who could keep a poker face under the stress of giant business transactions, was visibly shocked. A wiry, elegant-looking man of forty-six, he wandered aimlessly about the room for a space, then sat smoking in a stony silence.

Abruptly he stood and made for the door. He turned.

"Until I decide how to handle this, I want you to keep your mouth shut!" he told the butler. "No exceptions—not a hint to anyone. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. Perfectly. You have my word."

"I'll have your neck if you don't keep it!" Dillman erased the sting with a tight smile and departed.

He mixed a much stronger drink and took it with him to the study,

where he sank behind his desk and dialed his lawyer, Craig Wyant.

"I've got a problem," he said, "a mighty serious one. I need your help and advice, Craig. Can you come right over?"

They were old friends. Craig grumbled about the hour, wanted to know if it couldn't wait until morning.

"It can't wait another minute!" Dillman snapped. "When you get here, I'll explain. Please hurry!" He hung up.

Wearing slacks, a sport shirt and a mild air of annoyance, Craig Wyant arrived in twenty minutes. He was a few years younger than Dillman, a lanky six-footer with a lean, narrow face. He dropped into a chair and tossed one leg over an arm rest.

"I was halfway in the sack," he complained. "But you sounded like a five-alarm fire. Well, what's the pitch, Vince?"

"Andrea's been kidnaped," Dillman said flatly, then hoisted his glass and emptied it in one angry gulp.

Craig swung his leg to the floor and bent toward Dillman. "I don't believe it!" he exploded. "You sure? Maybe she just went out and forgot to—"

"She didn't just go out, she was taken out, by a couple of hoods." He explained in detail.

"My God! Andrea of all people!" said Craig with real emotion. For a stunned moment he sat in

ponderous thought. At last he shook his head.

"There's no good answer. You can call the police. Or you can pay the ransom. Either way, you're gambling with her life."

"I've considered that," said Dillman gravely. "But which gives her the best chance? We've got to decide quickly." He lighted a cigarette. "I don't have a hundred thousand cash lying around in a bank. As you know, Craig, most of my money is tied up in investments."

"I don't care a damn about the money if it'll save Andrea. But I'll have to unload some stock to raise it, first thing in the morning. So, which shall it be—the police or the ransom?"

"Well, statistics indicate that in about fifty percent of these kidnap cases—"

"Don't tell me about statistics! We're talking about Andrea!"

"You think I don't know that, Vince?" Craig Wyant's voice trembled. "Listen, I only want you to use the best possible judgement, based on fact."

"Forget about fact," said Dillman stridently. "If your wife had been kidnaped, what would you do?"

"I'd figure the police might botch it and I'd pay up," said the lawyer. "But that's only my personal reaction and I don't say it's the best advice."

"I'll get the money," said Dill-

man decisively. He sighed. "Frankly, I'm scared to death for Andrea. I don't dare tell anyone else and it's a lonely burden. Will you come over tomorrow evening and wait with me for the phone call?"

"Of course! I'll be on tap until Andrea's home safe. Meanwhile, try not to worry. All they want is the money."

ANDREA WAS confined in a small, locked bedroom. The windows were boarded up. Aside from the bed itself, there was not a stick of furniture, not even a carpet to cover the warped, hardwood floor.

They had left the city, she guessed from the diminishing sounds of traffic, and had traveled for more than two hours. From the tilt of the car she had gathered that the last part of the journey was uphill. A mountainous area? A cottage by a lake?

There was a feeling of isolation. The silence was deep, unnerving. The room was in darkness, though a narrow blade of light escaped from beneath the solid door. She was not tied or gagged.

"Scream all you like," she had been told. "Who could hear you?"

The two kidnapers had not harmed her and Andrea was more outraged than frightened. Vince was devoted to her, as everyone knew, no one better than she. Certainly he would not risk the police. He would pay the ransom and then she would be free. The tall man

with the weak chin and the sleepy, reptilian eyes had assured her that when the hundred thousand had been delivered, they would drive her to the edge of the city and release her.

The shorter man, who had a thick neck and blunt features branded by a crescent-shaped scar on his left cheek, had nodded agreement.

"But if Dillman won't pay," he added, "don't make any plans for the future."

Watching the man as he said this, studying him covertly, Andrea observed that both he and his partner were rather odd physical specimens. From memory, she could sketch their exact likenesses so precisely that graphic facsimiles of the criminals could be reproduced upon the pages of newspapers and circulars across the country.

Right then, Andrea proposed to produce a perfect image of each man for the police at the first opportunity.

She was well equipped for the task. Not many years ago, she had been acclaimed as a leading portrait painter.

Her talent had made her popular with the rich and famous; she had often been commissioned to do their portraits at extravagant prices. Indeed, it was her talent which had brought her together with Vincent Dillman, President of the Pacific Land Development Corporation. The high brass at

Pacific had wanted Dillman to sit for a portrait which was to be hung in the board room, and Andrea had accepted the commission.

Soon after she married Dillman, Andrea became spoiled by luxury. She lost interest in her painting on any regular or competitive basis. She painted only when she felt a rare urge to do so, or when Dillman persuaded her to create the portrait of a friend.

Then too, there was a handsome distraction in the form of Craig Wyant, with whom she became passionately involved, even before Dorothy Wyant died after an operation which developed "complications."

Craig had suggested that Andrea divorce Dillman and get a settlement. But Andrea was greedy. Craig, as Dillman's lawyer, had told her that Vince had willed Andrea the bulk of his fortune.

And Andrea had wanted that whole beautiful bundle. She told Craig that they would share the loot in marriage if Craig could bring about her husband's demise.

Craig was shocked. But in Andrea's embrace he recovered speedily and to such an extent that he made contact with an underworld go-between who promised to arrange a fatal "accident" for Dillman.

Andrea had contributed fifteen hundred dollars to the cause, but to date Craig's contact had not kept



his promise. In fact, he had vanished with the down payment. And now Andrea wondered if it might not be possible that she had created the very situation in which she found herself.

It didn't require any big brain to figure what must have happened. Craig had planted a seed in the mind of his contact. If Dillman was such a devoted husband, why kill him for a few thousand? Why not kidnap the wife and hold her for ten times as much in ransom?

It was an ugly double-cross, yet it was typical. When amateurs played with the boys in the big league of crime, they could expect to get burned. She should've known better!

Yet her plot to remove Vince was beyond proving. There wasn't a shred of evidence. Even if someone talked, she couldn't be linked to the plan by fact. And who would believe some character with a long record? On the other hand, the minute she was free, she could

literally nail these goons to the wall—paint them in oil if she chose!

She was mentally sketching her jailers when the tall man with the lazy eyes opened the door and paused at the threshold of the room. For a time he stood frozen in the half-light, gazing at her with hooded intensity.

She wanted to make some brave sound of defiance, but all at once she was frightened. When her mouth opened to speak, the words wouldn't come.

"I can't hear you, baby," he said, and snickered. Then he stepped back and closed the door. The key turned; there was the rattle of a bolt.

At a minute past seven on the following evening, the phone rang in Dillman's study. Dillman stared across the desk at his lawyer. They exchanged glances. Dillman snatched the receiver.

"This is Vincent Dillman."

"You got the money—a hundred grand?"

"I want to speak with my wife."

"What about the dough?"

"I have it ready to deliver."

"Take it to the Parkside Hotel. Now. Check in. We got a room reserved in your name. Room eight-fourteen. Wait in the room for another call. Come alone and don't set up any games with the cops or lover-girl won't be comin' home to papa—except maybe in a box.

"Now, here she is. You got ten seconds—talk your head off!"

"Andrea? Honey, are you all right?"

"Oh, Vince! Vince, darling! I'm all right, but you *must* bring the money. And don't call the police. They wouldn't hesitate to—"

"I have the money, sweetheart, and I'm bringing it. Don't you worry. Just as soon as I can get the cash into their hands, you'll be on your way—"

He stared at the phone, then replaced it. "They cut me off," he said heavily. Then he repeated his instructions to Craig.

"Do exactly as they tell you!" Craig warned him.

Vincent Dillman sat in stunned silence.

Craig poured himself a drink from the decanter on the desk and flipped it down. "You won't fumble this, will you, Vince? I could do it for you if you're too upset. You look dazed."

"How did you expect me to look," he growled. And then: "Sorry, Craig. I'm on edge. You can't help now, I've got to do this alone. They demand it." He stood. "What if they don't keep the bargain after I give them the ransom?"

"That's a terrible question, Vince. I can't answer it. I'm a lawyer but I don't really know a damn thing about what people like this will do. They'll let her go. They've got to!"

Dillman unlocked a desk drawer and began to feed stacks of currency into a worn briefcase. When

it was done, he closed the case.

"I'm ready," he said.

They went outside. Craig Wyant climbed into his car.

"You're a good friend," Dillman said. "I won't forget, Craig."

Craig smiled wanly. Dillman watched him drive away. Then, clutching the ransom case, he moved briskly toward a three-car garage at the side of the house.

The Parkside was a dreary, second-rate hotel on the east rim of town. Dillman registered, paid in advance and went up to 814. After glancing around the room with distaste, he set the briefcase on a table and sat down to wait.

An hour passed, during which he smoked incessantly, looking out now and then from his eighth story window down to the grimy street below and out across the city.

Voices rose and fell in the corridor. There was the muted thunder of elevator doors above a blaring radio. The night was cool enough and the window was open, but he felt damp and smothered. He had removed his coat and was wrenching at his tie when the phone rang.

"You got the cash with you?"

"I told you once that I would bring—"

"Okay. Put your coat back on and take a little hike down the corridor." Startled, he glanced up at the window, almost as if he expected to see a face suspended there. "Walk in the opposite direction

from the elevators and turn right. Halfway down you'll see an unmarked door. It's a broom closet. Inside, on the floor, there's a cardboard box with some cleaning junk. Look under the box."

Click! The voice was gone.

His eyes darted about the room. With the feeling that he was a target, that his smallest movements were being watched, he shrugged into his coat and went out, locking the door behind him.

He stepped uneasily down the hall, swung right and halted before an unmarked door. It opened upon a lighted closet. Beneath a low shelf he spied a cardboard box containing scrub brushes and a variety of bottles. He lifted the box and found the white envelope. He tore the flap.

A single printed line read: WE'VE GOT THE MONEY—YOU'LL GET YOUR WIFE BACK BEFORE MORNING.

Puzzled, he understood when he returned to the room. They had a key, or they had entered by way of a connecting door. The briefcase was gone.

In the morning, Craig Wyant came over to join him. Together, they waited all through the day. When Andrea did not phone or appear by nightfall, Dillman said in a voice dark with despair, "It's time to call the police."

"We should've called them long ago!" Wyant cried.

In an hour, the local police were

swarming about the Dillman mansion. The next day, the FBI joined the hunt. Though the kidnapers were not caught, Andrea was found soon enough.

Two men fishing on a mountain lake ninety miles east, pulled her body from the water.

Craig Wyant sat beside Dillman at the funeral. Dillman dabbed his eyes repeatedly with a handkerchief.

On the evening of the third day after the funeral, Vincent Grover Dillman alighted from a cab, entered a splendid apartment building and ascended to the top floor. Humming tunelessly, he removed a key from his pocket and opened a door. A blonde young woman of delightful proportions arose as he entered and rushed into his arms.

"Darling," she sighed, "it's been such a long time!"

"Only a week," he replied with an indulgent smile.

"Eight days, seven hours and twenty minutes," she counted.

"I love you, too," he told her with a chuckle. An arm around her waist, he guided her to a sofa.

Sitting close, they touched glasses and sipped the cocktails.

"Well," she said expansively, "it's all over. Now we can make real plans. How soon do you think we can—"

"Get married? I think it would be discreet if we waited a couple of months, don't you?"

"But not longer?"

"No, not longer."

In a moment she said, "You were so guarded on the phone that I never did quite understand what happened. You actually arranged the whole thing?"

"Not at all!" He recoiled. "Naturally, I wanted to be rid of Andrea. But murder never entered my mind."

"No, the kidnaping was a total surprise, a strange bit of luck which I turned to my advantage. In a sense, I simply let matters take their own course, though I did help a bit." His lips tightened.

She said, "But the newspapers had a big splash about the hundred thousand ransom."

"Yes, and that's just the way I wanted it. Actually, all but a few hundred dollars of that ransom is locked in my safe. You see, there were two briefcases. The one I filled with cash in the presence of Craig Wyant, and another which I stowed in the trunk of my car."

"Then what was in the case you turned over to the kidnapers?" she asked excitedly.

"On top, a fine-looking layer of cash. But only cigarette money, covering dummy stacks. Just enough so they would be deceived and would likely carry the case back to the hideout for a count; though it didn't matter as long as they were goaded into looking further."

"To find what?"

"A scrapbook."

"A scrapbook?"

"Yes. Andrea's pride and joy. Pages of clippings applauding her success as a portrait painter. It's been years since she received any publicity of that sort. And I was quite certain that those hoods had never read the art news. I knew her remarkable talent for transferring mugs to canvas would give them an unpleasant surprise."

"Now you take a couple of desperate kidnapers who've just been cheated out of the hundred grand they risked their hides for, and then you let them know that their victim is potentially a walking bomb set to explode with a blast that will stamp their faces on the front page of every newspaper, and chances are mighty good that you'll wind up with a corpse."

"Oh, Vince, how clever!" she exclaimed.

His features clouded. "In a way," he said pensively, "it's really too bad. I had nothing against Andrea; fact is, I was rather fond of her in my fashion."

"I sometimes wished that she'd do something offbeat or outlandish to freshen my interest. But no, she was monotonously the same, entirely predictable. In the end, she bored me to death. And then, of course, you came along."

Dillman's face brightened.

"Whatever else," she told him, "I promise never to bore you."

"I'll drink to that," he said, and lifted his glass.

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Detail of Death

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

*Somewhere in that house of fear a once proud
old man lay dead. And out in the hostile night
Mike Shayne laid one last nightmare trap for
a killer they said couldn't possibly exist . . .*



MICHAEL SHAYNE rubbed at his gaunt jaw and studied the elderly man across the desk of his private office.

"Let me get this straight, Mr. Hurdock," the detective said slowly. "You're being blackmailed. You think it's at least partly an inside job, someone in your family, and you want me to make the pay-off?"

Mr. Cornelius Hurdock nodded abruptly, and worried his elegant Van Dyke beard with a smooth and manicured hand. "In essence

that is the situation, although you are not precisely accurate in the details."

Hurdock leaned forward in the chair and ticked off points on the fingers of his left hand like a man crisply summing up the main features of an important business deal.

"First, it is not myself who is being blackmailed. It is my daughter. Second, I think it is partly an inside job, but not necessarily a member of the family. I have four servants on the premises. Third, I

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The new MIKE SHAYNE adventure



want you to make *this* payment. There have been previous payments."

"What does the blackmailer have on your daughter?"

Cornelius Hurdock sat back and tented his hands. His pale blue eyes studied Shayne. "Very little, actually. Some youthful indiscretions and companions, including a brief jail term for smoking marijuana. Not very important, but my daughter is a middle-aged matron with many community activities. If her rather stupid past were to become known it might cause her considerable anguish."

"The police are discreet as long as there's nothing criminal involved. Blackmailers rarely carry out their threats."

"Perhaps I should have gone to the police," Hurdock agreed, "but the demands were trivial, and I'm a very rich man. To save my daughter annoyance a few thousand dollars was nothing. Now, though, I have had about enough."

The cold blue eyes snapped at Mike Shayne, and the grey beard bristled. "Now I am convinced that someone within my household is at least an accomplice. I won't stand for that. I don't want the police, but I want it to stop."

"Just what do you want me to do?" Shayne said.

"Scare them off. End it now. Let them know that they have

gone to far," Hurdock said. "The first three payments were all small; this one is beginning to be serious. Apparently my willingness to pay has made them bolder, more confident."

"It usually does," Shayne said drily. "How much is this payment, and how much went before?"

"The first three payments were all one thousand dollars. The amount was so paltry I was sure the blackmailer was some petty crook making a quick profit and run. Now it is growing tiresome. I want you to take the fourth payment to the man. Give it to him, but be tough. Threaten him. Tell him who you are, and that this is the last payment, and if he attempts to harm my family he will be dealt with."

"You think I'll put a scare into him?"

"I'm sure of it. This is a case of easy money from some chance knowledge, and when the person finds it no longer easy, he will quit. That's why I want to make the last payment. I have always found that a hungry man is more dangerous than a well-fed man. Feed him this last five thousand dollars. Scare him, and he will stop."

"If you've got it figured right," Shayne said.

"I have. Anyone with guts and muscles would not have asked for such trivial sums. And if someone inside my household is involved, as I think, the threat of professional

police work to reveal him will send him scurrying for cover."

Shayne tugged on his earlobe and frowned. "You're assuming a lot, Mr. Hurdock. Blackmailers don't run as true to form as other criminals. You can never be sure how they will act."

"I'm sure, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne shook his head. "Then the police would scare him more, and without much risk of the information leaking."

"But some risk," Hurdock snapped. "With the police there is always a risk of reporters. My money gives me the privilege of using private pressure, and I want to use it. Will you do it?"

Shayne sighed. "All right, but I have to know some more. For instance, who do you suspect in your household?"

"I haven't any idea," Hurdock said, and ran his manicured hand through his thick grey hair. "I have no proof."

"Who's in your household?"

"My daughter Anna, and her husband George Rowe, who also works for me in Hurdock Inc.," the old man said crisply. "My great-nephew, Karl Hurdock; my grandson, Richard Rowe; and the four servants. Neither of the younger men are worth a damn. My son-in-law George isn't worth too much either."

"What do the younger men do?"

"Sponge off me, essentially. Richard is a playboy with not



much to play on. Karl is a dabbler in every art known to man, and bad in all of them."

"Who are the four servants?"

"Mrs. Kranski, the housekeeper; Felix, the chauffer; Dolores, the general maid; and Jesus Diaz, my gardener."

"Any of them new?"

"Only Dolores. The rest have been with me for years."

"Did Felix drive you here? Is he downstairs now?"

"Of course not," the brisk old man snapped. "I'd hardly want any of them to know I was hiring a private detective, would I?"

"No one knows you're hiring me?"

"No one," Hurdock said, "unless someone followed me, and that would tend to expose the miscreant, wouldn't it?"

Shayne nodded. "It would. All right. Tell me where I go, and

when. You have the money with you?"

"Yes. You go to an isolated cabin on the beach, some miles south of Miami. I have the directions. The address is twelve Laguna Way. It's deserted and unapproachable without being seen. The first three times I went myself."

"Always the same place?" Shayne said, frowning.

Hurdock nodded. "I told you the person was an amateur."

"So you did. When?"

Hurdock looked at his watch. "In three hours. It's five-thirty now; you're due there at eight."

"You left it pretty late," Shayne said.

"I did," Hurdock agree. "First, I didn't want anyone in my house to have time to know what I was doing. Second, I didn't want to give the man I hired a chance to think of joining the blackmailers."

There was a silence as Shayne studied the spry old man. Hurdock's eyes did not flinch. They stared straight at Shayne, and he stroked at his beard with his long fingers.

"You're a suspicious man," Shayne said.

"A realist, Mr. Shayne, and careful. Will you do the job?"

"Yes, but my own way. If I have a chance to catch the blackmailer, I'll take it despite the risk of exposure to your daughter if he gets away from me."

Hurdock worried his beard. "Very well, although I would prefer you to simply pay and warn. He won't try again if he know's I've hired professional help."

"That's not my way. If I take him, and he talks, I'll come after the inside man if there is one. I'll turn the inside man in, no matter who it is."

Hurdock stood up. "Do as you must, but I want this stopped."

"I'll stop it," Shayne said grimly. "You can pay my secretary."

He sat back in his desk chair and watched the old tycoon leave. The redhead scratched at his gaunt jaw. He knew old Cornelius Hurdock by reputation—a hard, tough man who was tight with a dollar unless it bought him more dollars. Hurdock was not a man Shayne would have expected to pay blackmail so easily. On the other hand a few thousand dollars would be petty cash to the old man.

Yet the story had a phony sound, and there was something about the old man that bothered Shayne, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

There was only one way to find out what was wrong. He looked at his watch. Three hours. Time for some dinner.

He strode into his outer office. "Put your hat on, Angel. I'm taking you to dinner."

Lucy Hamilton looked at him severely. "Just because you have a job with a millionaire is no rea-

son to throw money away, Michael." Then she grinned. "Where do we go?"

The brown-eyed girl reached for her hat while Shayne smiled.

II

MIKE SHAYNE drove slowly along the darkening highway. Traffic was heavy on the expressway to the Keys. Shayne concentrated on looking for the gas station and the side road just three miles south.

It was fifteen minutes before eight when he saw the station and the road just beyond and turned off the highway. The side road was black-topped and wound narrowly toward the sea. A purple twilight settled on the land of palms, sand, and tall grass. There were few houses, and the few there were became farther and farther apart as he drove on.

He had not seen a house for five minutes, and the sea was dark through the trees, when Shayne came to Laguna Way. It was a rutted road through sand, and there was no house in sight.

Shayne turned into the lane and drove slowly. He passed two dark and silent beach shacks, went around five curves, and came to the end of the road at the edge of the sea.

A single shack stood off the road. The number 12 was crudely painted on a post set in the sand.

Shayne stopped his car and lighted a cigarette. There was no light in the cabin. The redhead listened and watched, but he saw no signs of life in the silent shack.

He got out of his car and opened his jacket so that the butt of his heavy .45 automatic was close at hand. He took the package of \$5,000 and started toward the house.

He walked openly. There was no other way to approach. When he was some ten feet from the shack he stopped again and surveyed the place.

"You in there," he called out. "I've got the money. Show yourself!"

Nothing happened.

"If you want the cash come out!"

He waited, but there was no response. Warily, he circled the house. It was fully dark now, and as he reached the rear he saw a light in the shack. There had to be a second room in the shack, small though it was.

Shayne had the crawling sensation of being watched, but in the dark he did not make a good target. He continued his circle of the house, and, when he was on the blank side of the shack, he dropped to the sand.

Carefully he wormed his way back to the window with the light. When he was directly under the window, he raised himself and peered in. He saw an almost empty

room, like a storeroom, with a single lamp standing on a bare table. He could see no one in the room. He strained to see the corners, and realized the trap just two seconds too late.

There were two quick, soft footsteps.

From the corner of the shack to his right and behind him. Shayne made a half turn, saw a figure, and the night exploded in colors with the aid of something hard yet soft on the back of his skull.

III

MIKE SHAYNE came back to the night remembering something—but he could not remember what he was remembering.

He saw Cornelius Hurdock pulling at his beard. A cold-eyed old man, brisk and vicious with a blackjack in his hand.

No, the blackjack had been in another hand—an unseen hand on a dark shadow. At the corner of the shack.

Shayne opened his eyes and saw clear, bright stars in the high sky. They were a long way away, yet close enough to touch. He touched them. He missed the stars and pain squeezed his head. He lay breathing heavily. He closed his eyes again. But he was alert now, listening.

He heard the rustling of wind, and the lapping of a weak surf, and in the distance the steady,

ceaseless pulse of cars on the highway. He heard nothing else, and slowly he became aware that he was alone and not where he had been hit.

He could see stars directly above, but something blocked them all around. He tired to understand it. The stars straight up meant that he was not inside the shack. But the something that blocked them all around meant that he was inside something. It was puzzling.

He blinked a few times, and then looked at his watch. He blinked a few more times, and sat up.

He sat up suddenly, quickly, and there was pain in his head, but he did not notice the pain this time. He looked at his watch again and there was no mistake—the watch said that it was thirty. And the watch was not damaged.

Almost two-and-a-half hours. If he had been out that long from just a bump on the head he would be about dead. He was not dead. The headache wasn't even too bad, and the headache there was didn't come from the blow. Two-and-a-half hours was too much.

Much too much.

He stood up and, his eyes fully clear now, looked around where he was. It was not hard to know. He was in a hole of some kind. It had steep but sloping sides of hard sand. Perhaps a hole dug for ref-



WILL GENTRY

use. It didn't matter. The important thing was to get out of it.

He tested the sides and found them soft but firm. He began to kick foot-holes in the sides and swarmed up and out. The hole had not been intended to hold him, only to hide him for a certain length of time.

The redhead looked around in the night. He was some twenty yards from the shack and nearer the water. He saw no one and nothing, and there was no light at all in the shack now. He approached the shack warily again, but nothing happened this time. He pushed the front door, found it open, and stepped in with his automatic in his hand.

His mind, clearing, realized

that he was holding his pistol. He still had the gun. He felt in his pockets. The \$5,000 was gone. Nothing else was gone, and he had been left his gun. Again it added up to someone who wanted him out of the way for a time, but did not fear him after that period of time.

Shayne went through the deserted and silent shack and found nothing. The back room where the light had been was dark. He switched on the light. There was no one, nothing, and no sounds anywhere except the traffic on the distant highway and the sound of the gentle sea.

Under the light of the single lamp on the bare table he examined his arms. He found what he had expected just above the elbow of his left arm on the inside. A tiny, bruised puncture. Someone had used a hypodermic syringe on him.

That explained why he had been unconscious so long. It did not explain the reason. It did not explain why someone, probably the blackmailer, had been ready with a blackjack and the hypo needle, and had wanted him, Shayne, out for over two hours.

Not for the money—Shayne had come to give the blackmailer the money. Not to just prevent Shayne from seeing him, warning him, because the blackjack alone would have been enough for that. It did not even sound like a hi-

jack, the money taken by someone other than the initial blackmailer, because the blackjack would have been enough for that, too.

No, someone had wanted Shayne out of the way for some three hours, and in the silent cabin he did not know why.

He turned out the single lamp and walked from the shack. His car stood where he had left it. He got in and drove back along the narrow dirt track to the side road and then out to the highway. He turned north for Miami.

At the first gas station he stopped and called his client. A voice answered that was vaguely familiar.

"Let me talk to Mr. Cornelius Hurdock," Shayne said.

"Who's calling?" the voice asked.

"Mike Shayne," Shayne said.

The voice on the other end seemed to pause, then spoke slowly. "Were you working on something for him, Mr. Shayne?"

"Yeah, I was working," Shayne said. "Who am I talking to? Where's Hurdock?"

"I'm talking for him. Tell me about your work for him?"

Then Shayne recognized the voice. He knew the voice of a cop when he heard it, and he knew the voice of this cop. "What's happened, Lieutenant Bellows?"

"Just tell me what you were doing for Hurdock, Shayne," Lieutenant George Bellows said.

"Blackmail. Maybe an inside job. Didn't he tell you?" Shayne said, but he somehow already knew the answer to that. Bellows was Homicide, and Bellows was at the Hurdock mansion.

"No," Bellows said, "he couldn't. He's dead. It's murder now, Shayne."

IV

A UNIFORMED COP opened the door of the Hurdock mansion and Shayne strode in. George Bellows was waiting for him. The redhead looked around the mansion, now a blaze of lights surrounded by police cars.

"Where is he?" Shayne asked.

"In his study," Bellows said. "The medical examiner is with the body. Let's talk in the living room."

Shayne followed Bellows into the living room. Other Homicide men were talking to the rest of the family. Bellows ignored them.

"Sit down, Mike, and tell me your story."

Shayne sat down and told about everything since Cornelius Hurdock had come to his office. Bellows listened with a frown on his face that grew blacker and blacker. When Shayne had finished, Bellows swore softly.

"Damn, the way it sounds we'll maybe never catch him. You didn't even get a peek at him?"

Shayne shook his head. "Not a

flash. Anyway, it was probably two men. Hurdock was pretty sure there was an inside angle to the blackmail."

"That figures," Bellows said. "The way he was killed it looks like the killer was already inside the house and just walked into the study openly. Hurdock must have felt safe with the killer."

"How was he killed?" the red-head asked.

"Stabbed twice. No signs of struggle on the body, but the room is messed up. French doors are unlocked. They lead out to the garden and the garages, and the walk is concrete. They lock inside and they were not busted through to get in. Everything points to someone walking in by the door and out by the french doors."

"When did it happen?" Shayne asked.

A voice spoke in the doorway into the living room. "You better ask me that, Shayne."

The tall, lean figure of Assistant Medical Examiner Diaz came into the room. Shayne nodded to Diaz.

"When?" he asked.

"About ten," Diaz said, "or about two hours ago. I can place it within fifteen minutes either way; it was that recent."

Shayne rubbed at his ear. "So he left me about five o'clock, I was sapped and drugged about eight, and he was killed about ten."

"Just about time for the guy

who sapped you to make it back here," Bellows pointed out.

"Just about," Shayne agreed. "Who found him?"

"His daughter, Anna Rowe. Her story is that she hadn't seen Hurdock since about four o'clock. That didn't worry her at first; he often skipped dinner. But he always showed up about ten-thirty for coffee and brandy with anyone who was at home. When he didn't show she came looking for him. The study door was unlocked so she looked in and found him. She called her husband, George, and he called us."

"So the Rowes were both at home?"

"They were, and so were all four of the servants. Karl Hurdock is in Jacksonville on business for Hurdock, Inc. We're in touch with his hotel, and he should be back soon. Richard Rowe is out on the town, and no one's found him yet."

"Anyone see anything special?"

Bellows shook his head. "Not that they're saying. We haven't really interrogated anyone yet. They're all standing by. Hurdock was pretty damned important, so Chief Gentry's on his way himself."

"Can I take a look at the body?" Shayne asked.

"Sure, Mike," Bellows said, "if Doc here is finished with it."

Diaz nodded. "I'm finished. I'll

do an autopsy, but I'd say it was a pretty clean case. Stabbed twice. Both wounds fatal. I'll take him downtown whenever you say so."

"We'll have to wait for the Chief," Bellows said. "Come on, Mike."

The lieutenant led Shayne across a wide hallway into a smaller, panelled and book-lined room. Metal filing cabinets lined one wall, and a vault-safe was set into a wall. The french windows were behind the desk with the shades drawn. The desk was mammoth. The rest of the furniture was rich leather, heavy and deep with comfort.

The room was a mess, with chairs turned over and cabinets pulled out as if someone had been searching for something. Shayne frowned at the mess, and let his grey eyes glance over the whole scene. Then he turned his attention to the body.

Cornelius Hurdock lay behind the mammoth desk. The old tycoon was on his back, and dressed in a less formal suit than he had worn in Shayne's office. Blood covered his shirtfront and the carpet around him. Blood had spattered into the grey beard, and the cold eyes stared sightless at the ceiling.

"Stabbed while he was sitting in his desk chair," Shayne said.

"That's how it looks," Bellows said. "And that means the killer got mighty close before he struck,

which isn't easy to do with a ten-inch butcher knife."

"No, it's not easy," Shayne said. "Is the knife here?"

"It was under the body," Bellows said, and looked at a man who was on his knees dusting the desk with powder. "Anything on the knife, Brady?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant. Wiped clean," the fingerprint man said.

Shayne bent down over the body. The thick grey hair was hardly disturbed, showing that Cornelius Hurdock had died without a struggle. The manicured hands had spotless fingernails. There would be nothing under Hurdock's fingernails for evidence. Beyond the normal liver spots of age, there were no marks on the dead man's hands. But above the hands, on the wrists, there were red marks on the roughened old man's skin.

Shayne looked up at Bellows. "What do you make of these marks?"

Bellows squatted down. "Nothing much, Mike. Looks like maybe he wore something on his wrists. Maybe our killer took a watch."

"From both wrists?"

"A watch and an identification band, maybe?"

"Or wrist protectors," Shayne said, "except he wasn't wearing anything when I saw him. He had a watch on his left wrist, and it's gone, but there was nothing on his right wrist."



"Maybe he had a habit of shoving rubber bands up on his wrists," Bellows said, "or tight gloves."

"In this weather?" Shayne said. The redhead tugged on his ear. "It almost looks like his hands were tied."

"Maybe that's how the killer got so close so easily," Bellows said. "Jumped him, tied him, and then killed him."

"Any bruises on his head?" Shayne asked, and looked at Diaz. Diaz shook his head. "No, nothing, Shayne."

Shayne nodded, and looked at the legs of the body. There were no marks on the legs, but the crease of the trousers was slightly wrink-

kled. Shayne stood up and was about to say something to Bellows when the shots rang out.

"In the back garden!" Bellows cried.

"Come on," Shayne snapped.

The two men tore out into the night. To the right, where the high wall of the estate bordered the road, they heard shouts and men running.

V

BELLOWS HAD HIS gun out. Mike Shayne let the lieutenant take the lead. They ran on in the night until they saw a shadowy shape running away from the wall toward a dense growth of trees and bushes near the edge of the Bay.

"Stop!" Bellows cried. "Police! Halt!"

The figure vanished into the trees. Two more came running from the direction of the wall. Both of them held pistols. They were Bellows' men. One of them whom Shayne knew, Sergeant Gault, panted up to Bellows.

"We spotted him trying to go over the wall," Gault said. "We fired in the air and he jumped down, but he ran off when we thought he'd stopped."

"Did you see him?" Bellows demanded.

"No, just a guy. I couldn't see who."

"Was he trying to get out or in?" Shayne asked.

"Out, I figure," Sergeant Gault said.

Mike Shayne looked at George Bellows.

The lieutenant nodded. "No one was to go out," he said. "Let's get him."

Gault said, "I don't think he's got a gun."

"Cover us anyway," Bellows said.

Shayne and Bellows moved toward the dense clump of trees. Gault covered them from behind, and the other homicide man went around the trees to the shore. For a long minute nothing moved inside the trees.

Then a shadow seemed to flit, and Bellows called out: "All right. Come on out. You're surrounded, you can't get out. I'll give you three, and we'll shoot straight after that."

Shayne watched the darkness of the trees. He saw the shadow move, stand, hesitate, and then start walking slowly toward him.

The shadow emerged from the trees and spoke: "Very well, Lieutenant. I'm not armed."

Gault came up and flashed his light on the shadow. Shayne saw a tall, slender man with a pronounced stoop.

"What were you up to, Mr. Rowe?" Bellows said.

George Rowe, old Hurdock's son-in-law, stepped up to them. His tall frame shrugged. There was a pallor to his face, and Shayne

saw that his eyes were dark and haunted.

"Trying to get out, of course," Rowe said.

"Why?"

"To try to find my son before your people do," Roe said bluntly.

Bellows waited, but George Rowe said no more. The lieutenant waved his pistol toward the house.

"Okay. Let's get inside," he said, "and then I want your story. We'll find your son, so you might as well tell us all about it now."

Rowe marched sullenly into the mansion. Inside the french doors he glanced once at the body that still lay on the floor, then looked away. Bellows stood behind him.

"All right, Rowe. Why were you so anxious to find your son?"

"So you wouldn't railroad him," Rowe snapped, turning on Bellows.

"Why would we railroad him?" Shayne said. "What makes you think there's any danger of that?"

"Because Hurdock was sure that someone inside the house was blackmailing him over my wife's past," Rowe said. "Everyone knows Richard spent money like water, and always needed it. But so did Karl Hurdock!"

Bellows snapped, "Only Karl Hurdock isn't here in Miami, and your son Richard is."

Shayne said, "How do you know Hurdock suspected someone

inside the house was blackmailing him? How did you know there was any blackmail?"

"Because Hurdock told me himself," Rowe said.

"Hurdock told me that no one knew."

"I don't care what he told you; he told me about it all," Rowe said. "How would I know otherwise?"

"You'd know if you were the blackmailer," Shayne said.

Bellows said, "And you haven't given us enough reason for trying to warn your son before we got to him. You'd better start telling the truth."

"I won't tell you any more than —" Rowe began.

"Tell them, George," the voice said from the door.

It was a woman's voice, and they all turned to look. She was a small, delicate woman, but with a lot of her father's face on her. She advanced into the room, a determined wisp of a woman.

"I'm Mrs. Anna Rowe. All this is my fault, and I won't shield anyone not even my son," she said quietly.

"No, Anna!" George Rowe cried.

"Yes, George. Richard is weak and corrupt. I don't believe he killed father, but I won't hide anything. I thought it over, and you were wrong to ask me to keep silent."

Bellows said, "Keep silent about what, Mrs. Rowe?"

She turned to Bellows. "George wanted to reach Richard first because I saw someone running across the garden before I found father. It was a man, I think, and he was wearing Richard's best sport coat."

"How did you happen to see him? Wasn't it dark?" Bellows said.

She nodded. "It was dark. We were in the dining room, getting ready for our nightly coffee and brandy. I happened to go to the window. There is a floodlight at each corner of the front garden. I saw this man come around the house as if from the rear and run into the light. It could have been Richard."

"What time was this?"

"Just after ten o'clock. I wondered at the time why Richard had come home and was going out again in different clothes. But I didn't really think much about it until after I found Father. Then . . . then . . ."

George Rowe snapped, "Then I told her to say nothing until I Richard and found out the truth."

"Or maybe to be sure he didn't have a decent alibi," Shayne said sharply. He turned to Mrs. Anna Rowe. "Was your husband with you in the dining room when you saw this man running?"

"Why, no," Anna Rowe said, and looked at her husband. "You came in about five minutes later, George. You were late."

"So he could have been the man you saw," Shayne said. "The man

wearing your son's sports jacket."

"I—I don't know," Anna Rowe said, and she sat down heavily in a chair.

"On the other hand," Shayne said grimly, "we have only your word there was such a man. Maybe you made it all up to take any suspicion from yourself."

There was a silence in the room. Anna and George Rowe looked at each other. Lieutenant Bellows cleared his throat.

"I expect both of you gain a lot by Mr. Hurdock's death?"

"We gain a lot," George Rowe said.

"My father was a difficult man to be dependent on," Anna Rowe said.

"I expect he was," Shayne said. "What about the servants? Do you know where any of them were at ten o'clock?"

"No," George Rowe said. "I was in my room."

"Mrs. Kranski was making the coffee in the kitchen," Anna Rowe said. "Dolores was in and out. I have no idea where Felix or Jesus Diaz were."

Shayne nodded slowly. "If those doors were already open in the study, anyone could have gone in and killed Mr. Hurdock in a matter of seconds and been right back."

"But Mrs. Rowe saw her son, Richard Rowe," Bellows said. "I guess we better pick him up before we dig farther."

Shayne was about to answer

when a commotion at the front door drew the attention of everyone. There was a gruff, commanding voice, and Miami Police Chief Will Gentry came into the room, chewing on the stump of his black cigar. He saw Shayne and stopped.

"Hello, Mike. I heard you were here," Gentry growled, and then to Bellows, "We picked up Richard Rowe. He was drunk and passed out in a girl's apartment. He's downtown and not talking yet."

"What was he wearing, Chief?" Bellows asked quickly.

"Nothing much, but he had been wearing a blue suit," Gentry said, "and there was blood on his shirt."

VI

CHIEF GENTRY, Lieutenant Bellows, and Mike Shayne sat apart while Bellows' men went to round up the servants. Shayne tugged softly on his ear and asked about the blood on Richard Rowe's shirt.

"Did he say how it got there, Will?"

"No. His sweetie said they had a small fight and he cut her by accident."

"Can he establish where he was at ten o'clock?"

"With the girl," Gentry said, "if she can be believed."

"What about Karl Hurdock?"

"He's in Jacksonville all right. The Jacksonville police got my teletype and picked him up at his hotel. They're bringing him back now."



MIKE SHAYNE

"What time was that?" Shayne asked.

"They got to him about midnight. The hotel reports that he didn't leave his room after he arrived as far as they know."

Shayne rubbed his jaw. "When did he arrive in Jacksonville?"

"Jacksonville says he got the four-fifty train out of here, and it got into Jacksonville about eleven-twenty. Young Hurdock was on the train, witnesses saw him. He went straight to the hotel where he was picked up," Gentry said. "He's clear, Mike."

Shayne nodded. "It looks that way."

The gruff Chief of Police was watching the redhead. Shayne had a distant look in his grey eyes. Gen-

try puffed on his cigar and scowled.

"You've got something on your mind, Mike. Spit it out," Gentry growled.

Shayne shook his head slowly. "I'm not sure, Will. It's hazy right now. Something bothered me right from the first moment I talked to old Hurdock, and it's still bothering me. There was something about Hurdock's story that didn't ring true, but I can't place it exactly."

Gentry chewed the cigar. "What do you want to do?"

"Talk to all of them here in the house," Shayne said. "Ask some questions."

Gentry was silent. Lieutenant Bellows looked at the floor. Finally Gentry nodded. "Okay, Mike," he said. "I'll play it your way for now. God knows we don't have much to go on."

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said.

When the four servants and the Rowes were all in the dining room, Shayne stood and began to pace. He stopped in front of Anna Rowe.

"Mrs. Rowe, you said when you went to see why your father was late for his usual coffee, you found the door unlocked. Was that normal?"

"No. Father always locked his study door when he was working," Anna Rowe said. "If he forgot, no one would go in anyway unless he answered a knock."

"So the door would normally be locked," Shayne said. "It wasn't, and you went in. Why?"

"Because I was worried. Father wasn't a young man. I knocked a few times. When I got no answer at all, even to my calling, I went in. Father would have been angry if he had been working, but—well, I was worried."

Bellows said, "Or maybe you knew he couldn't be angry. You knew he was dead!"

"No!" Anna Rowe cried, "I didn't!"

"All right," Shayne said. "When did you last see him today?"

"When? I don't know. About three-thirty, I think. Yes, he was having a late snack and talking to Karl."

Shayne faced George Rowe. "How about you? When did you see your father-in-law last today?"

"I'd say about three o'clock," Rowe said promptly. "He was talking to Richard in the living room."

"Where were you about ten o'clock?"

"In my room, getting ready to come down for coffee. Frankly, I was disturbed about the black-mail. I was worried that Richard might be behind it because I knew he'd been gambling and needed money."

"Where were you about eight o'clock tonight?"

"Eight? Why, right here at dinner."

"With Mrs. Rowe?"

"Yes."

"Who else was at dinner?"

"No one. As we said, the old man

didn't come to dinner. Richard was out, and Karl had gone to Jacksonville."

"When did Karl leave the house?"

"About four o'clock, I believe."

"Exactly at four," Anna Rowe put in, "I spoke to him at the door."

"Were the servants here at dinner?"

"Mrs. Kranski was in the kitchen," Anna Rowe said. "Dolores served dinner. I didn't see Jesus Diaz, but Felix was still out working on the car."

Shayne nodded and turned to the servants. "Where were all of you at ten o'clock? Mrs. Kranski?"

The elderly housekeeper bristled. "I don't see why I should answer that! If I'm being accused of anything—"

Chief Gentry sighed. "You'll answer here or downtown, Mrs. Kranski. Shayne's got my permission to question everyone."

The housekeeper became sullen. "I was getting the coffee ready. They always have to have coffee."

"Dolores?" Shayne said.

The nervous little maid gulped. "I—I was sort of working around the dining room. You know, getting glasses for brandy, putting out napkins, all like that."

Shayne nodded. "How about you, Diaz?"

"I'm in my bed. I work hard," the gardener said, "I sleep early, up early. I don't know nothing."

The black-eyed chauffeur, Felix,

didn't wait to be asked. "I was also in my room. It is above the garage. No one saw me. It is not far from the study. But I killed no one."

"Did any of you four see Mr. Hurdock after about three-thirty?"

The servants all looked at each other. They all shook their heads.

"No one saw him after he came back from talking to me? That would have been about five-thirty or six o'clock."

No one spoke. There was a silence in the room. Chief Gentry chewed on his black cigar and watched Shayne. Bellows seemed puzzled.

"What are you getting at, Mike?" Bellows said.

Shayne paced the room. Then he stopped and looked down at Gentry. "I'm getting at an odd fact. No one seems to have seen Hurdock after about three-thirty—except me! I'm the last one to see Hurdock alive, unless someone is lying. No one saw Hurdock come home after he talked to me, which is pretty strange."

Gentry blew smoke. "But he wasn't already dead, Mike. The M.E. is sure he was killed just about ten o'clock."

"I know," Shayne said. "He was killed while I was out cold, drugged, at that shack. I was knocked out for two-and-a-half hours, and it was important to someone that I be out of action that long. Someone didn't want me contacting Hurdock before ten o'clock—or trying to."

"So what does it mean?" Bellows said.

"I think it means we've got a clever, well-planned murder," Shayne said grimly. "A murder that ran on a precise time table."

"What do we do about it, Mike?" Gentry said quietly.

"We wait," Shayne said. "We just wait for a time. I've got to know one more thing."

In the room no one spoke. Shayne sat down and lit a cigarette. The redhead blew smoke while everyone watched him and listened to the silence of the night.

VII

THEY WERE ALL still sitting in silence when Karl Hurdock walked in. The slender young man looked at them all with his cool blue eyes. He put down his suitcase, and his long, smooth fingers ran through his thick black hair.

"Can I see him?" Karl Hurdock said.

"In a minute or two," Shayne said quietly. "You made a quick trip back."

"They flew me," Karl Hurdock said. "I gather this is a police investigation?"

Shayne said, "Your great-uncle told me you dabbled in the arts, Mr. Hurdock. All the arts."

"What has that got to do with anything?" the young man said. He put down his suitcase and took out a silver cigarette case. His smooth,

manicured hands were steady as he lighted the cigarette. "Do you have any ideas about who killed Uncle Cornelius?"

Shayne was watching the young man's hands. He smiled a thin, tigerish smile, and his grey eyes were like flint. "I have an idea. In fact, I'm pretty sure. Sit down, Hurdock, and I'll tell you a story."

Karl Hurdock looked at Gentry. "Are you the police?"

Gentry nodded.

"Sit down, Hurdock," Bellows said.

The young man looked around, and sat down slowly. Mike Shayne continued to smile.

"It's a simple story," Shayne began. "Someone in this house was running some small-grade black-mail on Mr. Hurdock. Someone working alone. There never was an outside man. Old Hurdock had a good idea who it was, maybe even proof. He braced the blackmailer, probably threatened prison. The blackmailer couldn't take prison, couldn't risk exposure.

"So he planned to kill Hurdock. Only he was inside the house, and he knew he would be suspected. He had to have a perfect alibi. The best alibi was to be out of town, right? The only one out of town was you, Karl."

All eyes in the room turned to Karl Hurdock. The young man sat back and crossed his legs. He sneered at Shayne, the cigarette waving in his hands.

"I was, and I have witnesses."

"Naturally," Shayne said. "You were gone before old Hurdock ever came to me. That lets you out. Right?"

"It would seem so," Karl Hurdock said.

"Only it doesn't. That's where my story comes in. You see, knowing he had to be completely clear, the killer had to arrange it so that he was long gone when Hurdock died. To do that he needed a lot of time—time in which the old man couldn't spoil his plans."

"But how could he do that, Mike?" Bellows said.

"Simple," Shayne said, "he knocked old Cornelius out at about three-thirty today. Remember, no one saw Hurdock after three-thirty. Karl knocked him out, probably using the same drug he used on me. Then he tied him up and hid him in the study. He locked the doors, sure that no one would dare to go into the study. Everyone knew Cornelius Hurdock didn't allow anyone in, and didn't answer anyone who knocked.

"Then Karl left on his trip, making sure he was seen. He disguised himself as Cornelius and came to see me. I think we'll find that Karl is an actor, and he looks a lot like Cornelius anyway. With the beard he could fool me. Remember, I wasn't going to ever see Cornelius again alive! All he had to do was look like his great-uncle, and he did."

Anna Rowe exclaimed, "Karl is an actor, and a good one!"

"But, Mike," Gentry growled, "why did he have to go to you at all? Wasn't that pretty risky?"

"He had to, Will," Shayne said simply. "He needed a witness to testify that Cornelius Hurdock was still alive after Karl was on his train for Jacksonville. I was elected. Probably old Cornelius had threatened to go to me earlier. He also wanted me to testify that there was an outside blackmailer, and that I had been attacked by that blackmailer while he, Karl, was miles away on a train!"

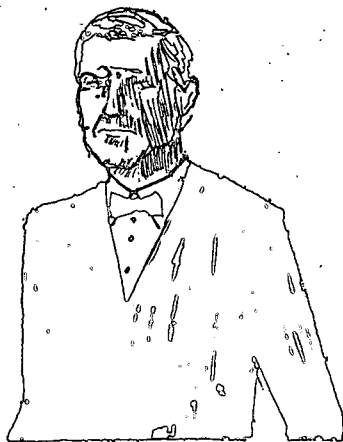
Karl Hurdock swore, jumped up. "Damn you, I was on that train!"

"He was, Mike," Gentry said. "He has witnesses."

"Only to the fact that he arrived on it in Jacksonville," Shayne said. "He got on, yes, and he was there when it got to Jacksonville. Only he got off at the first stop, came back to see me. Then he went to the shack and waited for me. He knocked me out—for two-and-a-half hours, remember."

"He came back here, unseen, and stabbed Hurdock at ten o'clock. He unlocked the doors, ran off, wearing Richard Rowe's coat in case he was seen, and flew up and caught up with his train before it reached Jacksonville! That's the only way he could have done it, and it was almost a perfect plan."

"He had me to say Hurdock was alive after five o'clock. He had me



to swear an outside blackmailer had been in that shack. But the really clever part was making old Cornelius a prisoner. Cornelius was as good as dead at three-thirty, but the M.E. would report ten o'clock as time of death, and I would swear Cornelius talked to me around five—all when Karl was on the train!"

Shayne turned his grey eyes to Karl Hurdock, who stood like a frozen stone. "That was the key—we had to be convinced that everything happened while Karl was on that train. We had to be convinced that Cornelius was alive and walking around after Karl left Miami. We had to be so sure Karl was clear that we would never check deeper, but he made a mistake, and now we'll check, and it won't be hard to trace his actions now we know what to look for."

A gun appeared in Karl Hurdock's smooth hand. Bellows and

two of his men jumped. Cursing, Karl Hurdock was wrestled to the floor, the gun dropping from his hand. Chief Gentry watched the cursing young man. Then Gentry looked at Shayne.

"All right, Mike. What mistake did he make? What made you think he could be the killer?"

"The rope marks on the dead man's wrists," Shayne said. "The fact that no one except me saw him after three-thirty, and the length of time I was knocked out, Will. It wasn't hard, once I guessed that the

man who came to my office wasn't really Cornelius Hurdock!"

"Damn it, how did you guess that? You said he looked like the old man. You said it was a good disguise."

"The hands," Shayne said quietly. "Cornelius had old man's hands; rough, spotted. The man who came to me had smooth, young hands. He forgot to disguise his hands!"

On the floor Karl Hurdock looked up at Mike Shayne for a moment. Then the killer began to moan.



Complete in the JULY Issue—

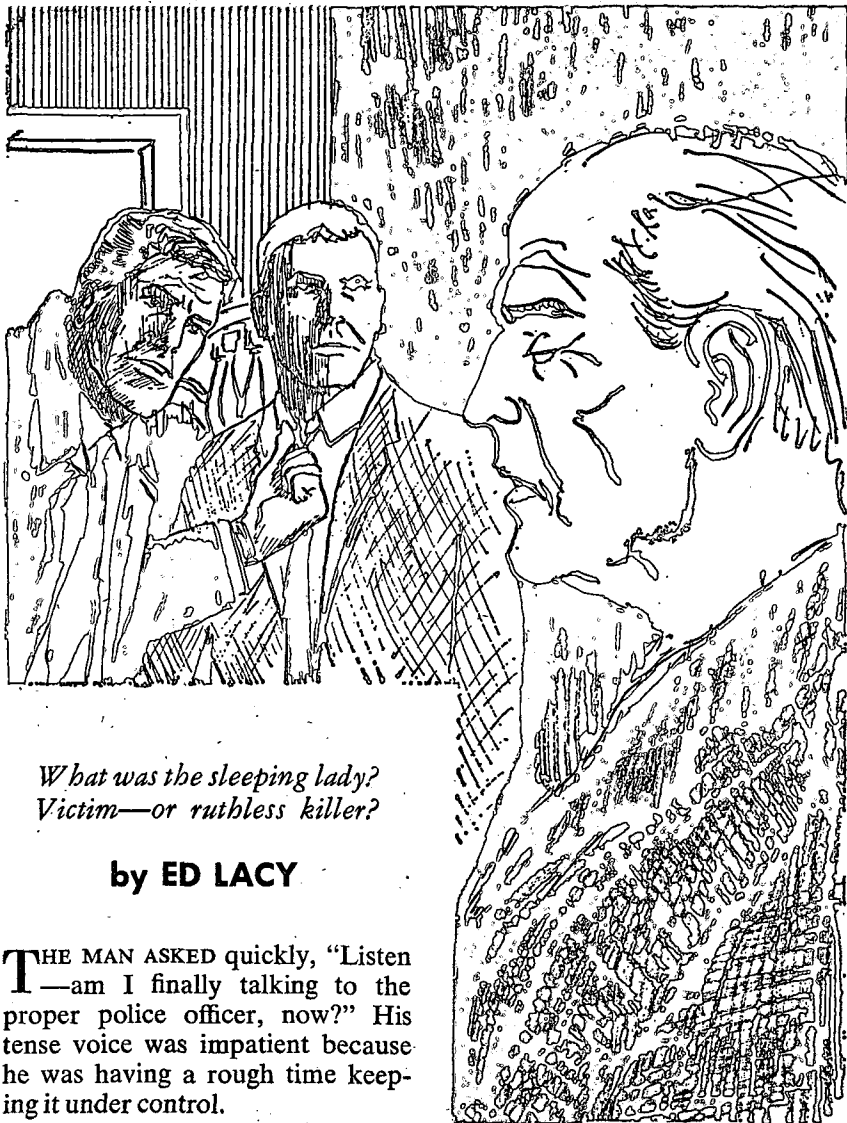
THE LADY WHO KISSED AND KILLED

A Thrilling New Mike Shayne Short Novel

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Tight-lipped, alone, a faceless phantom had managed to hide from the world and an army of foes until the day he died, riddled with bullets—and took his dark secret with him. Who was he? What fear-some thing had mastered his fate, even to the very grave? Only Mike Shayne dared to brave a murder ring and guess the incredible answer.

The Taut Alibi



*What was the sleeping lady?
Victim—or ruthless killer?*

by ED LACY

THE MAN ASKED quickly, "Listen—am I finally talking to the proper police officer, now?" His tense voice was impatient because he was having a rough time keeping it under control.

"This is the detective squad, Lieutenant Dave Wintino speaking." Wintino yawned as he fooled with the cuff links in his sharp shirt.

"Yes, a lieutenant should do. Well, as I started to tell whoever answered my call first, it's like this: our daughter Patty—well, she's kind of wild. Too much for the wife to handle alone, you see."

Wintino yawned again, waiting for the man to continue. It was late and Lieutenant Wintino had only dropped into the squad room to check on some details for a false arrest suit the city was involved in. He asked, "What's on your mind, mister? Your kid run away?"

"Oh no, she's in her bed. She'll never run any place. But she felt no pain. You see, I just shot her, as she slept."

"Who is this?" Wintino motioned for Detective Barney Ring working at another desk, to trace the call:

"Oh, I'll tell you who I am, in a minute. The thing is, I'm about to kill myself and I couldn't stick Belle with Patty. So I've shot my daughter. It's best, you see. Without me, the kid would run wild. My wife, Belle, she is sleeping, doesn't know a thing about this. She's quite nervous and takes sleep pills. The pills don't work for me any more. My life has become such a hopeless bore, I just can't take another dreadful hour."

"You see, there isn't any out for

me. I'm going to send a bullet into my head in a moment. But I'm the neat type, really, so I want the police to get everything straight. Tell my poor wife I'm sorry. I was going to kill her, but maybe without Patty and me, she can make a fresh start. I am Arthur Sloan and I live at seven hundred Nicholas Drive, Apartment Three-D. Good—"

"Now please wait, Mr. Sloan, let's talk—"

"No. I don't want to talk any more. I must do what I have to do while my nerve holds out. Good-by, officer." Arthur Sloan hung up.

As Wintino jumped up, Barney put his receiver down. "Not enough time to trace—"

"Seven hundred Nicholas Drive. Get a radio car there and let's go!" Wintino snapped, grabbing his jacket as he raced out of the squad room.

The red blinker of the radio car parked outside the old apartment house was like a tiny red star against the night. As Dave Wintino jumped out of the squad car a uniformed cop asked, "What did we buy, Lieutenant? Seems quiet."

"Murder, if it isn't a crank deal," Wintino said, running into the lobby and up the stairs, Barney and the cop right behind him.

When Wintino pressed the bell at 3D the sound was loud in the midnight quiet, then lost in the stillness. Wintino told Barney, "Break it open."

Barney Ring hurled his two hun-

dred thirty-five pounds at the door once and they were inside a long hall with doors opening off of it, the dim hall light showing worn carpeting. In the first bedroom Patty Sloan was in bed, the covers up to her bloody and once pretty face, a bullet hole between her still bright eyes.

In the next bedroom, Belle Sloan slept peacefully, a bottle of pills and a glass of water on the bed table. She looked about thirty-six, her relaxed and slightly plump face framed by dark hair in pink curlers. The heavy-featured face had a thick mouth, red lips now slightly open with her even breathing.

Barney said, "She's sleeping, okay."

Dave Wintino touched her hand on top of the cover. Mrs. Sloan merely sighed and turned over, still sleeping soundly. Wintino raced into the living room, where he found Arthur Sloan sprawled on the couch in torn white pajamas, a blackened bullet hole above his right ear, the gun on the carpet.

Barney whispered, "Well, he did what he said he was going to do."

Lieutenant Wintino snapped, "Maybe. Get the lab men and the medical examiner here—fast!"

At twelve forty-eight Wintino was in the kitchen, asking the medical examiner, "Doc, can you tell me which one died first?"

"That will depend upon the autopsy. If they were shot more than ten-fifteen minutes apart, I can.

What's the matter Dave? Aren't you buying the suicide deal?"

"I don't know. There's something too pat about everything. Doc, I want a paraffin test on Mrs. Sloan's hands."

"Now Dave, she's still out and you know we can't do that without her consent. Unless you're holding her as a—"

"I am holding her! Doc, can you get her out of the drugged sleep?"

The medical examiner nodded his brushed, silver-gray head. "Yes, but I don't advise doing it. She'll only go into shock on learning what's happened. Let her get all the rest she can; she'll need it. Dave, aren't you going off the deep end? Sergeant Carson of homicide is sure this is an open and shut case of murder and suicide. I've—"

"It may be exactly that, but I'm not sure," Wintino cut in, pacing the kitchen.

"I've already phoned Mrs. Sloan's physician, who gave her the sleep balls. He tells me Mrs. Sloan has been very nervous lately. Nothing serious, just business and kid troubles. And from what you've told me of the phone call, I'd say it all fits the fact the father killed his daughter and then shot himself."

"Maybe. But that phone call—he was *telling* us what to do. All adds up to an alibi for Mrs. Sloan."

The medical examiner sighed. "Dave, you know the pattern for suicides, how they love to brag before—"

"No, Doc, *would-be* suicides want to talk. A guy who never intends to jump will make a production of hanging onto a window sill. But the real suicides aren't talkers; they don't give a damn!"

"Come on, Dave, Mr. Sloan had just done a terrible thing, killed his daughter, so he had to explain that at least she died without pain, never knew what hit her. And he also had to explain about his wife being under sedation. What else could he say?"

"That's what bothers me: he didn't have to phone at all! Without the call, I'd never suspect Mrs. Sloan of being involved."

"Dave, you're overlooking the most important fact, a husband's last act of mercy and love for his wife: he wanted the police to arrive *before* she discovered the bodies. If she awoke and found them, it might drive her insane. Can I take the bodies?"

Dave Wintino called Barney Ring into the kitchen. "Lab men finished with the deceased? We get any prints?"

"Some blurred ones, belonging to poppa, on the phone and the gun. I phoned the deceased's brother; he's on his way here now, as I understand it."

Lieutenant Wintino told the medical examiner, "You can take them. When you perform the autopsy, Doc, keep murder in mind as a possibility for Mr. Sloan. You know what I mean."

"I know. I never make a routine autopsy or—"

"Can you make that paraffin tests on the wife's hands now?" Wintino cut in.

"Legally, we have no right to do it while she's under sedation, Dave."

"Go ahead and do it, Doc. I'll take full responsibility."

"All right. You heard him, Barney," the medical examiner said.

"Will the tests awaken her?" Wintino asked.

"I don't think so." The medical examiner gave the lieutenant a troubled glance, then left the kitchen.

Barney Ring lit a cigarette as Wintino poked around the cans of food in the kitchen closet. "Dave, stop acting like a caged tiger. You're giving me the jitters. When I talked to the brother on the phone just now, he confirmed the fact that Arthur Sloan had been very depressed about his business, for weeks now. Dave, the squad is involved in a false arrest suit now. Why the paraffin tests on Mrs. Sloan, while she's out cold?"

"Because I have a hunch it wasn't a suicide and if I'm right, time is the big factor working for us."

"You and your hunches," Barney mumbled, trying to blow a smoke ring as Wintino examined the inside of the shelves, the oven.

Minutes later a uniformed cop came into the apartment with a short, bald man, a raincoat over his



red pajamas, feet in slippers. The plump face was fighting hysteria. The man said, "I'm Harry Sloan. My God, this is awful, just awful!"

"I'm Lieutenant Dave Wintino. Sit down, Mr. Sloan. I have to ask some questions about your brother. I'm sorry it has to be now, when you're upset, but that's it."

"Yes, of course. Of course." Harry Sloan sat on a kitchen chair, almost fell down on it, rubbing his sweaty hands. "I never thought Artie would do anything like this."

"Have you any idea how much insurance your brother had?" Dave asked.

"I know the exact amount. His ten thousand dollar G.I. policy, term insurance, and a few smaller policies. All told they came to eighteen thousand dollars."

"Was the daughter insured?"

"Patty? I don't know. Yes, I think she had a small policy, maybe one thousand dollars. Officer, why are you interested in the insurance?"

"Let me ask the questions. How come you know the exact amount

of Arthur's insurance, Mr. Sloan? Are you in the insurance business?"

"No sir. I'm the manager of an export company. You see, I'm Artie's only and oldest brother and—My God, how could he have done it? Listen, about six weeks ago Artie and I talked over his borrowing twenty thousand dollars, using the insurance for collateral. I have a business head, so he always came to me with such problems. Because the G.I. policy is term insurance, Artie couldn't swing the loan."

"Your brother have any bank accounts?"

"He had sixteen hundred dollars in the store checking account. Belle has two thousand in a savings account. They could have sold the store for a few thousand. Well, when the loan fell through, Artie was very upset. You see, he hated being a storekeeper, the long, confining hours. This was his only chance to get out from under. I always said Artie would have been happier if he'd remained a bookkeeper, working for a steady salary. My poor brother!"

"Was he the ambitious type?"

Harry Sloan wiped his sweaty forehead with his hand. "No, just the opposite. Artie was a good man but not meant for business. He didn't have the drive for that. Now Belle, she's ambitious. She was the one who wanted them to go into business for themselves. So they bought the grocery store, twelve

years ago. I warned Artie that the little storekeeper hasn't a chance today. He had to put in a fifteen hour day to make a modest profit.

"Artie didn't have time for books, concerts, plays, all the things he was so fond of. The store become a sort of trap. He had nothing else he could turn to and Artie was forty last February. God, how could he have done this? How—"

The medical examiner appeared in the kitchen doorway. When Wintino stepped out into the hallway the doctor whispered, "The paraffin tests prove Mrs. Sloan never fired the pistol."

"Thanks, Doc. How soon will she come out of her sedation?"

"Not before morning. I'm leaving one of my assistants here, with her. I'm removing the bodies now."

Dave Wintino returned to the kitchen. Harry Sloan was slumped in his chair, weary eyes staring at the tiled, linoleum floor, mumbling, almost to himself, "It was no life for Artie, coming home tired every night, no time for anything. My brother was a cultured man, he needed plays and books, decent conversation."

Barney Ring was leaning against the sink, lighting another cigarette.

Wintino said, "Mr. Sloan, you told me your brother wasn't ambitious, but he was very upset because he couldn't borrow twenty thousand dollars. What did he want the money for?"

"To open a supermarket."

"Then he was ambitious?" the lieutenant insisted.

"No. Artie—" In the hallway the two bodies were being carried out on stretchers. Harry Sloan turned to look, then stared at the floor again, sobbing.

After a moment Lieutenant Wintino said gently, "I realize how upset you must be, but the sooner you answer my questions, Mr. Sloan, the faster we can get done with this. Now, if Artie hated being a storekeeper, why would he want to start a supermarket?"

"Well, you see, with a small store, what can you do? I mean, with a supermarket, there was a chance Artie could make enough to retire in a few years. And be able to hire enough help so Artie would have more time off. Belle used to work in the store, but when Patty reached twelve, they were worried about her, so Belle stayed home to keep an eye on the girl. Artie hired a man to help him, although the store couldn't afford a second salary. How could Artie have done this horrible thing?"

"Tell me about the supermarket deal?"

"Some months ago Belle, through an uncle of hers, learned the city was buying property on San Hill Road, going to build a tremendous project there. Belle scouted around, learned they could get a long term lease on a corner across from the project for a few thousand. The idea was to build a supermar-

ket, have it open by the time the project was up.

"Artie needed a minimum of twenty-five thousand dollars to swing the deal. Even then it would have been risky, but once thousands of people were in the project and before any of the chains could put up stores, they might have made money. Anyway, Artie couldn't get the loan. I even offered to put up my house, but the banks turned him down. It was over. Matter of fact, the man working for Artie, Howie, he's leased the corner, plans to open his own store."

"How did he learn about the proposed project?"

Harry Sloan shrugged his soggy shoulders. "How did Belle's uncle know? Word gets around."

"Was Artie angry at this Howie?"

"No. Why should he have been? It was merely a business matter. Howie didn't push Artie out. I told you, my brother couldn't raise the money. Howie's younger and full of pep. There wasn't anything personal about it."

"Howie still working for Artie?"

"Oh, yes. It will be at least a year before the project is up, his store built. Officer, I don't understand what you're getting at. I've told you, my brother was very upset at the thought of remaining a petty storekeeper for the rest of his life."

"About the daughter, Patty. What sort of trouble was she in?"

Harry Sloan sighed again, almost

groan. "She wasn't in any trouble. Among the other things my brother *shouldn't* have been was a father. He didn't have the temperament. Patty wasn't a wild kid, but at sixteen—well, she was mature physically and headstrong, like all teenagers these days. Both Artie and Belle were too strict with the kid. You know, every time Patty went out to a dance, they were sure she'd return pregnant.

"It's a wrong attitude and only added to the tense atmosphere here. My wife tried to reason with them, to let the girl alone. But—well, either they shouldn't have had any children or a house full of kids. I mean, if Patty failed a subject in school, Artie got hysterical. You know."

"Did your brother ever talk of suicide?"

"Never! If he had, I would have done something—had him talk to a head doctor. But he was a beaten man. I kept telling him things weren't so bad, that in a few years Patty would probably marry, or be on her own, then Belle could return to helping in the store. But—can you understand what it meant for a man who likes books, plays, trips, to put in fifteen hours a day, seven days a week in a store, haggling over a pound of potatoes, having to listen to the petty gossip of housewives? It wasn't any life for Artie."

Wintino rubbed his long-ago-broken nose, the only thing which gave age to his baby face. "Mr.

Sloan, can a man build a supermarket, from the ground up, for only twenty thousand dollars?"

"No sir, it would take at least a hundred thousand. But, like I told you, the twenty-five thousand dollars, not twenty thousand dollars, was the absolute minimum needed. If Artie could have borrowed the twenty thousand dollars, he could have raised the other five thousand on his store, the money they had in the bank. And deals could have been worked out—like he had a meat company ready to finance the refrigeration in return for exclusive use of their products. Other deals like that.

"Unless the store showed an immediate profit, Artie would have been sunk. As I told my wife, if anything went wrong, Artie would have had a breakdown. But Belle was the driving force. She has the mind for details, the daring. Can I see her?"

"She's still sleeping, under sedation."

"Thank God. I'll have my wife come over, be with her when she wakes up. Can I go home now? I don't feel well myself."

"Sure. And thank you. I'll have a squad car drive you home."

"I have my car downstairs."

Harry Sloan got up, a weary motion.

Lieutenant Wintino said, "One more question. Were Belle and Artie happy? Was there another man or woman around?"

"What? Are you crazy? My

brother's a suicide, my niece is dead. Isn't that enough tragedy?" Harry Sloan was almost yelling, his sweaty face pale.

"Easy, Sloan, I have to check all angles. Tell me, how often did you or your wife see Artie and Belle?"

"Due to his long hours we actually didn't see them more than maybe once a month. You can't ask a man to Sunday dinner when he's working all that day. And Artie had to open at seven every day. We talked on the phone, though, nearly every day. And Patty would be over at our house about twice a week; we've a boy and girl about her age. Nice kids." His voice died and the kitchen was heavy with silence.

Starting for the door, Harry Sloan turned and asked, "Officer, I suppose this will be in the papers?"

Wintino nodded. Sloan shook his bald head and went out. Barney tried another smoke ring as he said, "Well, it does add up to murder and suicide, all tight as your hatband."

"Maybe too tight. What about the gun?"

"Arthur Sloan had a permit for it. His store was held up last year. Dave, you ready to go back to the squad room, knock off?"

"Not yet. Barney, did I have you check on the neighbors, if they'd heard anything?"

"No, you didn't have me do that. Nor did you tell me to zip up my pants! Dave, I been a working cop for a lot of years now, know my

job. I checked. Next door neighbor has been away for a week, rest of the house was asleep or lost in TV. Okay?"

"Thanks, Barney." Wintino walked down the hall, into the living room, which was still being photographed, a chalk outline of where the body had been on the couch and rug. Thumbing through a leather book on the phone stand, Wintino called in Barney.

"This Howie Williams," he said, "must be the guy working for Artie. Ask him to come to the squad room in the morning. Get him around seven-thirty, before he can go to work. See what you can learn about him in the meantime—married, bank accounts, yellow sheet, everything."

"Yes, sir." Barney's tone also said, "Let go of it, give the case up. It's closed, finished, never was anything."

Before Barney Ring could get his hat, reach the front door, the phone rang. Dave Wintino took it and the medical examiner said, "Dave, something a trifle suspicious: there's a red blotch on the girl's stomach. Could be due to several things, including being hit there just before she died. Also, I've found bits of skin and hair under the finger nails of her right hand. Haven't had time to test these yet, but the hair looks like a male's, and—"

"How soon will you finish the autopsies, Doc?"

"Come on, Dave; I just got back



to my lab. I'll have a report by morning. Only working through the night because you have this wold theory about murder."

"I'll be here the balance of the night, call me the second you know the time of death and which one died first. Oh, thanks, Doc." Hanging up, Wintino yelled, "Barney!"

Barney came trotting back into the living room.

"Bring Howie Williams here at once! And be careful, he's dangerous. Especially if you see any scratches on his face or arms. I told you that phone call was too damned pat! There's skin under the girl's nails, meaning she put up a fight!"

Barney's big mouth actually hung open with surprise. Then he mumbled, "Could be she awoke to see daddy standing over her with a gun? So much blood on Artie's face, we wouldn't have seen scratches."

"No!" Wintino said it with a hard grin. "The medical examiner would have seen any scratches. And remember the phone call. The guy claimed he'd shot his kid while she slept, all that no pain jazz!"

"You think this Howie did it? I

mean, Dave, Belle isn't any beauty. I can't see a guy killing over her."

"Barney, on TV they murder for love and all that gas. In real life it's always for money. Belle's an eager-beaver longing for the big time, a supermarket. Artie can't raise the cash. Suppose she and Howie were playing house, or maybe they weren't, but they cooked up the murders, the pat alibi. Howie comes here with the gun from the store, wearing gloves, after Belle took her sleep pills. He's sitting around, talking to Artie, who probably wants to get to sleep.

"Okay, Howie has to shoot Artie first, otherwise Daddy will put up a fight when Howie knocks off the daughter. Maybe Artie dozes off and Howie guns him, runs into the girl's room. But the shot's awakened Patty and she tries to fight. Howie shoots her and phones us, talking as Artie. It was too neat!"

"Where does the money come in?"

"Barney, weren't you listening to the brother, in the kitchen? Artie's insurance amounts to eighteen grand, plus the daughter has a one thousand dollar policy and Belle has a few grand in the bank. Selling the store, it means she and Howie can raise the twenty-five thousand dollars to get their supermarket deal off the ground."

Barney Ring shook his head, looking a little sick. "I don't know. You're making this Belle some kind of a monster."

"Barney, ambition is a hard driver. Belle's an ambitious woman, sick of her bumbling small-time hubby, her problem daughter. Bring Howie in, and be damn careful. Then we'll get Sleeping Beauty up. They played it too damned tight, all down the line. Get going, Barney!"

The note of almost savage triumph in Lieutenant Dave Wintino's voice made Barney Ring both envious and uneasy.

ED NOON IS BACK AGAIN IN—

THE UGLY PENNY MURDER

By MICHAEL AVALLONE

In the next issue

SCRATCH ONE SECRET AGENT

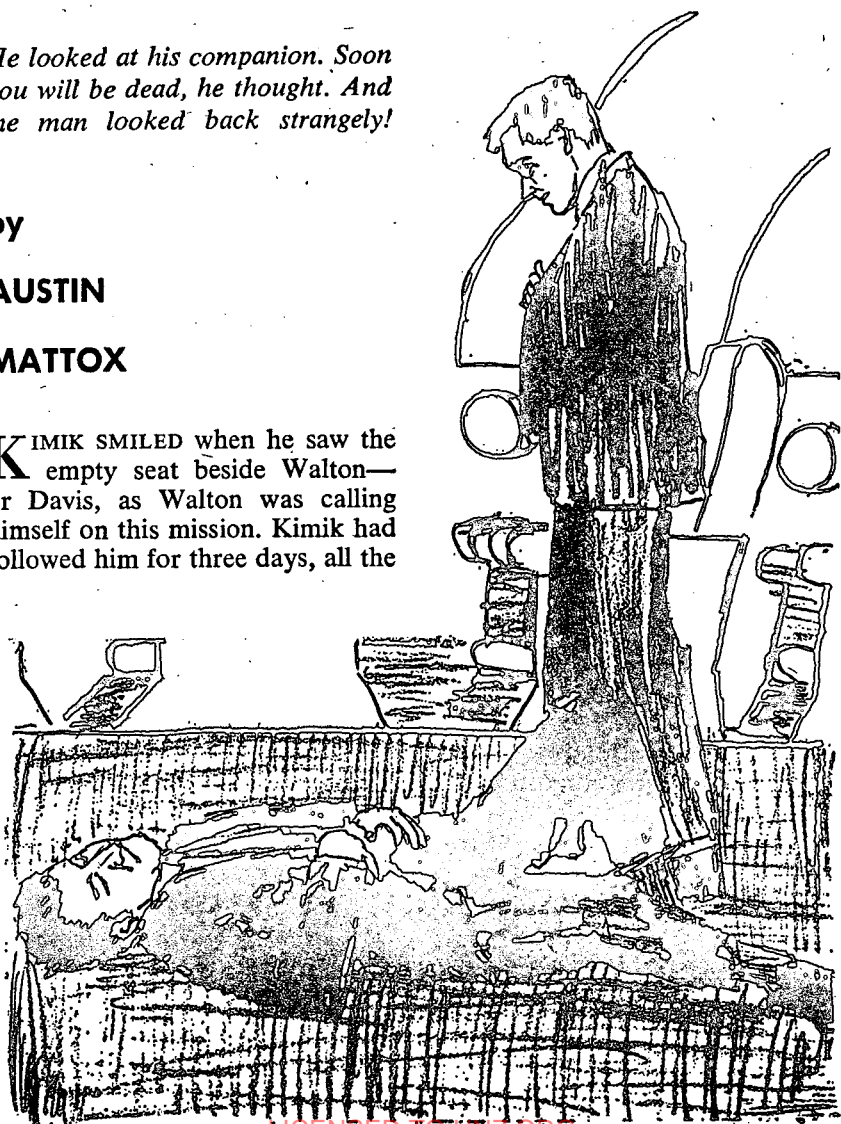
He looked at his companion. Soon you will be dead, he thought. And the man looked back strangely!

by

AUSTIN

MATTOX

KIMIK SMILED when he saw the empty seat beside Walton—or Davis, as Walton was calling himself on this mission. Kimik had followed him for three days, all the



while waiting for an opportunity like this. He stood in the aisle of the plane and asked casually, "This seat taken?" His accent was perfect; most Americans would place him somewhere between Indianapolis and Dubuque.

Walton glanced up and shook his head.

"No," he said indifferently, and he returned his attention to the window. He had not given the slightest hint of recognition.

Kimik dropped into the seat and snapped the belt into place. He depressed the backrest to a more comfortable position. Then he began the wait which must pass before the moment came when he should kill Walton.

Ah, these American agents, he thought. What fools! They immerse themselves so thoroughly with electronic devices and esoteric apparatus. Yet they slight the very rudiments of the trade. No agent in the world could follow me three days and then sit next to me unrecognized.

As the aircraft climbed, Kimik cautiously studied Walton. It was difficult to imagine that this plain man could have eliminated an agent as good as Porynovitch. Even harder to imagine was that one who had established an espionage record as outstanding as Walton's would allow Kimik to approach him thus. The chin was weak, and the small eyes behind those thick glasses seemed nervous.

It was a tired face topped by a receding hairline. Perhaps that was the answer, Kimik decided; perhaps Walton was tiring. If so, he thought, I shall do him a service when I dispatch him.

As they leveled off, the stewardess passed up the aisle with drinks. Kimik ordered a highball, but Walton took nothing. Kimik smiled. Perhaps Walton will remain alert and make a contest of this affair. But that is unlikely. When the moment comes, he will not know it. He will be alive and then he will be dead. *Poof!* Like that.

At most he will know only an instant of discomfort, a moment too brief for him to realize that he has been killed. A moment too brief for him to regret having killed Porynovitch.

The pilot's voice came over the loudspeaker, announcing the flying time, cruising altitude, and weather forecast. He said they might encounter rough air soon. The seat belt sign flashed on again. Kimik had removed his seat belt, and one end of it had fallen between the seats. Walton politely helped him extricate it. Kimik snugged it up so tightly that it pinched him.

As he waited for the stewardess to come for his glass, he began to feel nauseous. He must have finished the drink too quickly, he thought. Or the rough weather may have begun.

It would not do to get ill. That could spoil the plan. He got up and

walked back to the restroom. There he leaned down to the lavatory and splashed water on his face. That helped.

For a moment he wondered if Walton could have put something into his drink. He had watched his man closely, however, and he felt sure Walton could not have drugged him. Besides, he was confident that Walton did not even know him.

Kimik unbuttoned one button on his shirt and withdrew a small plastic ampule from a sheath strapped across his stomach. Holding the ampule to the light, he grinned as he thought how quick and lethal the gas in it was. As they landed: that would be the proper moment. A squeeze of the bevelled end of the ampule, and an invisible cloud would silently, odorlessly whisk Walton to eternity before he knew it!

Kimik fingered the ampule gently in his pocket as he stepped out of the restroom.

Immediately he noted that the temperature in the cabin had risen. And something had happened to the light. The interior of the aircraft had become suffused with an eerie redness.

As he walked to his seat, the floor seemed to move under him like a treadmill. It was only with great effort that he managed to reach his place.

He loosened his tie and shook his head to clear his senses. He



looked around at the other passengers, but they showed no awareness of anything unusual. They were smiling broadly. *But unnaturally*, Kimik thought. Strange smiles. They had not appeared like this before.

He turned in his seat and looked at the man behind him. That man smiled the strange smile, too. Kimik looked across the aisle. It was the same there. Then to his astonishment he realized that the smiles were painted on, like the smiles of circus clowns! The mouths did not smile, but the paint did. Indeed, the mouths were quite sad.

The thought flashed through Kimik's head that he had fallen asleep. He pinched himself. But, so far as he could tell, nothing changed. Except that the plane was getting hotter. And it now flew absolutely smoothly. It moved like a canoe on a calm river. He could no longer hear the jets.

Kimik became excited. No one else was excited.

"What is the matter with you?"

he cried. All the painted faces turned toward him, smiling blankly.

He whirled and glared at Walton. "What have you done? You're responsible for this!" As he stared, Kimik realized that the person to whom he spoke was not Walton. It was someone else. A complete stranger.

He leaped to his feet and ran up the aisle. He ran for a long time, but he couldn't make any headway. He looked at his watch. The hands were whirling furiously. The hour hand spun at a rate much faster than the second hand ordinarily did.

This is a nightmare, Kimik thought. It was too hot in this plane. Something must be happening to it. Perhaps it was afire! In a frenzy, he tore off his coat and ran harder. Finally he collapsed and fell in the aisle. He fell for a long time, and when he stopped, he saw that

blood blotted one side of his shirt. He pulled up the shirttail. In his side was a scratch edged with congealed black blood. It was where the seat belt had pinched.

To his horror, Kimik noted that the wound was exactly like the mark he had seen on Porynovitch's corpse.

"I've been hit!" he cried. "Walton did this somehow. He did it, but I didn't even know it!" He choked on the words as he realized what he had said.

"My God!" he screamed.

The painted faces jerked around toward him. He heard the loud-speaker crackle and he expected to hear the pilot's voice. Instead he heard an incredibly evil sound. It snaked back to where he waited, trembling and fearful.

"Mr. Kimik, we do not allow that term down here. Do not ever use it again."



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June—1968



THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF ROGER BLAINE

by
CLAYTON MATTHEWS

All his idea needed was a girl who liked
to live . . . and a man who wanted to die . . .

TO MAKE THE swindle work, Roger Blaine needed two things: a job and a wife. Not necessarily in that order, but both were of equal importance.

He wanted a job with an insurance company. It didn't have to be that, but it would make everything much easier. Once settled in at the

job, he could look around for a wife. That might take a little time, but he meant to work at the job for at least two years before putting the plan into action.

He could afford to wait. The sum he had in mind was one hundred thousand dollars. If he had finished college, which he hadn't,

it would take him at least ten years, much luck and application, to earn that kind of money. And even then taxes and day-to-day living would have eaten up most of it. The way he had it planned, the money would come to him in a lump sum, with the living yet to come. So, what was two years?

Roger had a way with figures, an inherent ability that likely would have benefited him, if cultivated, in some honest pursuit. He had no such intention; he never for an instant considered it. With only two years of college, he had little chance at an important position, but he finally landed what he wanted, a job in the actuarial department of a large life insurance company.

The head of personnel was a woman of forty, and Roger liked to think he had charmed his way into the job.

Perhaps he did. There was no denying the fact that his proximity often addled feminine wits. He was twenty-five, with black hair, dark eyes, a wide mouth that smiled easily, and a deep voice that could register various emotions with an actor's ease. He wasn't classically handsome, yet his countenance was open and honest, the features ruggedly assembled.

Stan Carpenter was tall, muscular, heartily masculine, with bright blue eyes and blond hair bleached almost white by the sun. And his hide was tanned a mahogany color.

Stan had been in actuarial for five years and was definitely on his way up. David Fisher, head of the department, was only eight years away from retirement. Stan was his fair-haired boy, being groomed as his replacement.

Stan was elected to show Roger the ropes. Roger's work would deal with mortality tables. Some people might have thought that sort of work morbid. Roger thought it ironically fitting, in view of what he had in mind.

During a coffee break on the first day, Roger learned something that he instinctively knew would be of use later.

"From the looks of that tan you must spend a lot of time at the beach, Stan."

"I do indeed, Roger. Surf fishing," Stan said with enthusiasm. "Ever try it?"

"Never did. Somehow the ocean's never appealed to me," Roger lied.

"You don't know what you're missing. I go nearly every weekend, winter and summer."

Stan laughed with flash of strong white teeth. "Being single, I can get away with it. You should come along some time. You'll like it, I know."

"I just may do that. Give me time to shake down here a little first."

Already the final concept was forming in Roger's mind. Handled properly, Stan could provide the

crowning touch. Maybe now he could step the schedule up a little. That, of course, meant he had to get married quickly.

There were a number of things required of the girl he married. She mustn't be too bright, and she had to have a streak of greed in her nature. The latter trait Roger was sure wouldn't be difficult to find; he considered most females born with that quality.

She had to have a job she could work at after their marriage; most of his small salary would be going toward financing the swindle. She should be reasonably attractive physically. This wasn't absolutely necessary, but it would make the whole thing pleasanter. People would likely look at him askance if he married a homely girl, considering his appeal for anything in skirts.

Why didn't he just find a woman with a hundred thousand, or more, and marry her?

It had occurred to him, but he'd found it wasn't all that simple. Meeting a single, or a widowed, or a divorced woman with money was difficult, if not impossible, for a man without at least enough financing to haunt the luxury watering places they inhabited. The hundred thousand he expected from the swindle should pave the way nicely; it should move him up into the million-dollar bracket.

He found the girl within two months. She worked for the same

insurance company, which employed over a thousand women, most of them single. Lita Holmes worked in the steno pool. While not as empty-headed as blondes are often characterized as being, she wasn't far from it, in Roger's estimation. But she was well-constructed, she had a cat's triangular face, she slitted her green eyes like a cat, and she actually purred when stroked.

On their second date, during their good nights at her apartment door, she trailed fingers soft as feathers across his lips and said, "You're sweet, Roger. I'm going to like you."

"You're sweet, too, Lita." Then he asked her to go to the beach with him that Sunday.

"Oh, I simply never go to the beach! I have a perfect horror of the water. Besides—" She stroked the creamy skin of her cheek—"the sun turns me the color of a lobster."

This answered an important question for him. He wanted to set Stan up alone. Eventually Lita would have to be told everything, but it was better she didn't know too much too soon.

And after they'd dated a few times, Roger got the answer to his last question from one of the girls in the actuarial department.

During lunch Lita had quizzed her exhaustively as to what Roger's future prospects were. "And I put her on a little, Roger. I told

her you'd be battling Stan for department head when the time came."

Proving that Lita, at least to Roger's satisfaction, had the required touch of avarice in her make-up.

She would do nicely.

A month later Roger asked her to marry him. She squealed and ran into his arms, her mouth clinging. After a little of that he managed to capture her hands and hold her away from him.

"There's one thing, Lita. You'll have to keep on with your job for awhile. I'm just not making enough money now to—"

If she was disappointed, she hid it well. "That's all right, darling. I don't mind, so long as it's not forever."

"It won't be forever, I promise you. Just until I get my feet under me." In his first probing maneuver, he added, "Or until I strike a windfall."

Her face grew still. "Windfall? What windfall?"

"You never know. Anything might happen."

"Oh, I just know you're going places, darling!" She threw herself into his arms again, tiny teeth nibbling at his cheek.

She did express strong disappointment over the matter of a honeymoon. "But surely the company can spare you one lousy week for a honeymoon!"

Roger hadn't asked for the time

off. He said, "I haven't worked there long enough to get a week off, Lita. We'll take one later. By that time maybe we can afford a real honeymoon."

"But that won't be the same as now!"

Aside from the fact that he didn't want to divert any funds away from the advancement of the project, there was another reason he didn't wish a honeymoon. Lita was as affectionate as a kitten. Roger had never been able to endure affection for long. Prolonged closeness with another human being made him jumpy. He knew that a week's rich diet of Lita would start him climbing the walls.

Lita proved to be understanding in other ways. Two months later Stan invited Roger to go surf fishing with him on a Sunday. Roger said he'd talk to Lita about it.

"Of course you go, darling," Lita said. "I think it's good for men to get away from their wives at least once a week. Of course, poor Stan isn't married, is he?"

Lita had never met Stan and knew about him only those things Roger had told her. He didn't want the two to meet. Probably no harm would come of it, but he didn't care to take that chance.

He said, "Sure you won't come along?"

"Not to the beach! Besides, I'd only spoil your fun."

Stan had all the equipment and loaned Roger what he needed. Al-

though Roger was at home in the ocean, he had never done any surf fishing, so his ignorance wasn't entirely faked. Their luck wasn't good; they didn't catch anything large enough to keep.

Finally Stan said, "I guess that old saw about beginner's luck doesn't hold with you, Rog. Let's go for a swim so the day won't be a total waste."

"I don't know," Roger said dubiously. "I'm not the best swimmer in the world. And the ocean—"

"Don't worry about it. I'm pretty good, if you don't mind my saying so. I beat my way through college lifeguarding at the beach summers."

The lifeguard bit was an unexpected dividend. When the time came, Stan's swimming ability would tie the bow on the whole package and should certainly help quiet any doubts.

They spent two hours in the water. Stan was solicitous and helpful, treating Roger like the tyro he claimed to be, handing out swimming hints with uncondescending largesse.

The Sunday surf fishing became an almost weekly ritual. Their fishing luck improved and Roger showed gradual improvement in the water. One day Stan said, "Rog, you take to the water like you've been in it all your life."

To a large extent, this was true. Roger had started swimming in the Atlantic Ocean off the Florida



coast at ten, had started skin diving in his teens and had been an expert Scuba diver for five years.

One afternoon he said to Stan, "Have you ever gone surf fishing farther south, somewhere this side of San Diego?"

"Naw. It's no better than here."

"Even so, it might be nice to take a whole weekend off some time and go down. Maybe stay overnight."

"Well, it's something to think about." Then Stan brightened. "Say, it might be okay at that! Let's plan on it."

Weeks before Roger had taken another important step forward in his plan. He had taken out a fifty thousand dollar life insurance policy, double indemnity, with the company he worked for.

To Lita's question he gave the same answer he'd given the agent writing the policy. "I can afford it because I recently came into a small inheritance from an uncle I

didn't even know I had. It isn't much but it's enough to take care of the premiums." For Lita's benefit he embroidered the lie.

"I didn't tell you because I wanted it to be a surprise. I thought you'd be pleased."

"I am, darling. Of course I am. But—" She narrowed her eyes in thought. "Is this the windfall you mentioned?"

"What? Oh no, this came at me out of left field." He grinned. "I have a hunch there'll be a better windfall than this coming along, so be prepared."

Originally he had intended waiting out the full two-year suicide clause, but everything was going so smoothly he decided to shorten the time considerably. What with Stan being on the scene, Roger didn't think the suicide team would turn up anything even remotely pointing to suicide.

The suicide team was a group of three doctors, a psychiatrist, a psychologist and an M.D.; brought in by the company to investigate the accidental death of a policyholder. They delved into the background of the policyholder, then did a little detective work into the death itself for any evidence of suicide. Actually there was no time limit to a double indemnity policy.

But Roger Blaine wasn't worried. There was nothing in his background remotely hinting at suicide. He was young and healthy, happily married to a beautiful

woman, and his future with the company looked rosy. The only danger was at the scene of the accident, and Roger was confident of his own ingenuity, plus Stan's being an eye witness. And his being a company employee would expedite payment of the claim.

Lita balked like a mule when he finally told her what he planned. He had expected that, of course. He set about bringing her around. "Think of all the things we can do with that hundred thousand. We can travel, do just about anything we like."

"But it's dishonest!"

"Dishonest is as dishonest does." He smiled briefly, engagingly, then sobered. "Lita, insurance companies are fair game. It's not like robbing a bank, say. Everybody sticks it to insurance companies."

It took him two weeks of steady pressure, plus accepting and even returning affection, to break down her resistance.

Her capitulation was complete. "All right! I'll do it! Tell me again what I'm to do."

He told her, down to the last detail.

Now everything was ready.

He made a date with Stan to go surf fishing down the coast over a weekend; they planned on spending Friday and Saturday nights in a motel a few miles north of San Clemente.

The Saturday before this particular weekend Roger took a

Grayhound bus to San Clemente. He wore a brown hairpiece, liberally sprinkled with gray, and a heavy moustache, also salted with gray. A few artful touches of make-up had added years to his features. He carried a large ratty suitcase, filled with what clothes he would need and five hundred dollars in cash; and a battered portable typewriter.

Since the advent of the Freeway to San Diego bypassing the business districts, the prosperity of the small coastal towns had suffered, and Roger didn't have any trouble finding a small, furnished, court-type apartment a few blocks from the beach.

He gave the rental agent a false name, the first month's rent, and told the man that he was a school teacher taking a year's sabbatical and needed a place both cheap and quiet where he could complete a book. The agent, anxious to rent, was reassuringly incurious.

Late in the afternoon Roger took a walk down to the beach. It was thronged with weekend beachgoers. About a mile north the beach area became rugged, rocky, inhospitable to swimmers and surfboarders and was almost deserted.

Satisfied, he strolled back to the apartment. He waited until evening before returning to Los Angeles, leaving the suitcase and its contents behind. Aside from the clothes and the money, the suit-

case also contained duplicates of all the items used in his disguise.

When he got home to the apartment in Los Angeles, Lita was waiting up for him. They quickly returned Roger to his normal self, destroying the hair piece, et cetera. When the last item was flushed down the drain, Lita giggled nervously. "If I hadn't helped you put on all that goop, I wouldn't have recognized you and let you back in tonight!"

He grinned. "That's the general idea."

"Oh, darling!" She threw herself at him. "It is going to be all right? It is going to work?"

"It'll work, Lita. You'll see," he said into her hair. She was going to be hard to ease out of the picture when the time came. But he'd manage. One step at a time.

The next and most important step of all was the following weekend with Stan Carpenter. Roger insisted on driving them down in his old car, claiming that Stan had been overly generous with his little sports car. Actually Roger had the diving equipment locked in the trunk of his car.

They drove straight down after work on Friday night. They had a couple of drinks and dinner, strolled on the beach, searching out the best spot for tomorrow's fishing, then turned in early. At Roger's insistence they had rented two rooms. "Not that I don't enjoy your company, Stan, but I have a

thing about sleeping alone. We even have two bedrooms in the apartment."

Roger sat in the dark motel room until long after midnight, until every unit was dark. Then he got the diving equipment out of the car trunk, including an underwater flashlight and a short-handled spade. On the section of the beach they had selected for tomorrow's fishing, Roger undressed down to swim trunks and slipped into the harness, settling the Aqua-Lung firmly into place, then put on swim fins, face mask and weight belt.

He walked backward into the surf, then worked his way out beyond the breakers, about two hundred yards from the beach. He settled to the bottom, around thirty feet down, removed the weight belt and draped it across his legs to hold him down while he released the instant-release webbing knots of the harness. He lifted the loosened tank over his head, keeping the mouthpiece in position.

He put the tank on the ocean floor, dropped the weight belt over it, tucked the swim fins, spade and face mask under the tank so the weight belt would hold them on the bottom as well.

Then he took a final deep breath, turned off the tank valve and placed the mouthpiece between the valve and regulator to secure it. He rose slowly to the surface and looked around until he found a good-sized piece of kelp,

tied a length of green cord to it and dropped down to tie the other end of the cord to the Aqua-Lung.

Then he swam back to the beach, buried the underwater light deep in the sand, gathered up his clothes and returned to the motel to get what sleep he could before morning.

They were on the beach at dawn; Stan believed the early morning best for fishing. This was fine with Roger; it was the ideal time for what he had in mind. There would be few people about, perhaps a fishing nut or two, but no swimmers. Secondly, and more importantly, he knew Stan wouldn't be interested in swimming until he'd put in at least half the morning fishing.

There were a few men casting in the surf, but the surfboarders weren't out yet. And, as they began fishing, Roger scanned the water for the bobbing heads of swimmers and saw none.

Within a very few minutes he yawned elaborately and said, "I can't seem to wake up. I think a dip'll do me good."

"Now? We've hardly wet a hook yet."

"The fish will wait." Already Roger was shucking his clothes. Finally he was down to swim trunks, in the pocket of which was a tiny compass and the key to the apartment in San Clemente.

As he waded into the water, Stan called after him, "Be careful

out there, Rog. There're some mean rip tides along here."

"I'll be careful, teacher. You can be sure."

Roger Blaine swam straight out to the anchored kelp. He untied the cord and sank to the bottom to untie the other end and tucked it in the trunks pocket. Then he surfaced, took a deep breath and yelled at the top of his voice, thrashing his arms wildly. The figure of Stan on the beach was doll-size.

Roger couldn't wait to see if the man heard or saw him. These were the most ticklish few minutes of all. He knew Stan was a powerful swimmer. He had to get into his gear and vacate the area before Stan could swim out.

In his haste he lost his grip on the tank, and it started to float away from him. He fought back a rise of panic and managed to retrieve it. He struggled into the harness, got the mouthpiece into place and turned the valve, starting a flow of air into his starved lungs. Then, skimming along the ocean floor, he followed the compass south, darting an apprehensive glance back over his shoulder every few yards for Stan's bulky shadow. Within a few minutes he was far enough away to be reasonably safe from discovery.

He stayed underwater for what he judged to be at least two miles before he came up for a cautious look around. He knew he was out

of sight of Stan, but he didn't want to be seen by anybody. He remained far out until he was opposite the rocks he'd seen on the beach at San Clemente last Saturday. Then he moved slowly in, his gaze constantly scanning the beach and the cliff above the rocks.

He saw no one. It didn't mean he wasn't observed, but was a risk he had to take. Of course, even if he was seen, it might not mean anything to the observer, but it would make the next few weeks far easier for him if he knew he hadn't been seen.

Once in among the rocks and underneath the cliff overhang, the danger of being observed was minimal. He stripped off the gear and buried it, item by item, at widely located spots, well above the creep of high tide. Finally it was done, the spade the last piece buried.

There were a few people on the beach when he emerged from the rocks, some bikini-clad sun-worshippers and several teen-age surfboarders. No one paid him undue attention. He dawdled like an early-morning swimmer, spending some time on the beach before he casually made his way up to the court apartment. As far as he could tell he wasn't seen going into the apartment. Once inside, he heaved a shuddering sigh of relief.

Lack of sleep, unusual physical activity and strong nervous tension had left him in a state of near ex-

haustion. But before he could rest he had to assume again the disguise he'd worn when renting the place.

From this time forward he would have to live the character twenty-four hours a day.

And now began a period of waiting. It was a time he'd girded himself for. Nonetheless, it wasn't easy. He had given Lita firm instructions not to contact him under any circumstances, either by phone or by mail, until she had collected the insurance. Even then, she was to be absolutely sure she wasn't under observation before she came to him.

The story made the papers the next day. The item that interested Roger the most was a brief quote from an interview with Stan Carpenter: "I heard him yell and saw him waving for help. But by the time I got there, he was gone. I blame myself. I taught him how to swim, you see. I shouldn't have let him go in alone. Such a waste, his untimely death. He was young and had a bright future ahead of him."

Roger smiled, speaking aloud, "My future is still bright, Stan. Brighter than you'll ever know."

When no body was found after an extensive search, the theory was advanced that it had been caught in a rip tide and carried some distance away. It could be trapped on the ocean floor and might not wash ashore for some time, if ever.

There was nothing in the papers

on the third day, nor on the days that followed.

Roger waited. He spent most of the time in the apartment, going out only to shop and for solitary walks late at night along the beach. Now and then he would bang on the typewriter for a time, in the event anyone was listening or cared.

The only relief from boredom was his daydreaming, expanding his plans for the future. As soon as he had the money in his hands, he would purchase forged papers and establish yet another identity for himself, as well as a new one for Lita. He decided to go to Mexico first, probably Acapulco, a favorite wintering place for rich widows. He didn't know yet what to do about Lita. He'd take her along to Mexico. When the time came to ditch her, he could just walk away. She couldn't go to the police. Once she accepted the money, she would be as criminally involved as he was.

The waiting continued. Unless something went wrong, a claim such as this was normally paid within a reasonably short time. Yet ninety days passed, and Roger began to worry. He could think of only one explanation. They must still be watching Lita to see if she made contact with him. He would have to do something soon; the five hundred was rapidly running out. Again and again he resisted the impulse to call her. If she were being

watched, the phone would most certainly be tapped.

And then the soft knock came one night just after midnight. Roger hurried to the door and flung it wide.

"Inside, Rog," Stan Carpenter said, the blunt snout of the gun in his gloved right hand prodding Roger's ribs. "Back inside."

Roger's brain refused to function properly. He stumbled back into the room and watched numbly while Stan closed the door and shot the bolt.

"I don't understand—," Roger finally said in a rusty voice.

"You will, Rog. Think about it for a minute."

"Lita told you!"

"Lita told me, Rog." Stan grinned amiably. "We have no secrets from each other these days."

Roger could think of only one thing. "The claim?"

"Oh, it was paid. No trouble there. It was a beautiful scheme, Rog. I'll hand you that. You made

one miscalculation. Lita needs lots of love and affection. You didn't give it to her. Maybe you haven't got it in you to give." Stan's gaze was speculative, then he shrugged lightly. "The thing is, when I went to tell Lita of her—loss, we discovered each other. How about that?"

"And now?"

"You know the answer to that, Rog. Whatever else you are, you aren't stupid."

Roger's control slipped. He said wildly, "You'll never in this world get away with it!"

"Oh, I think so. You're already dead, remember? Dead and buried, in a manner of speaking. Now it appears the reports of your death were greatly exaggerated." Stan took two gliding steps forward. "I'm here to take care of that. If you're found on the ocean floor months from now, who can tell how long you've been there?"

Roger Blaine threw up his arm, but he was too late. The gun smashed through his guard and against the side of his head.



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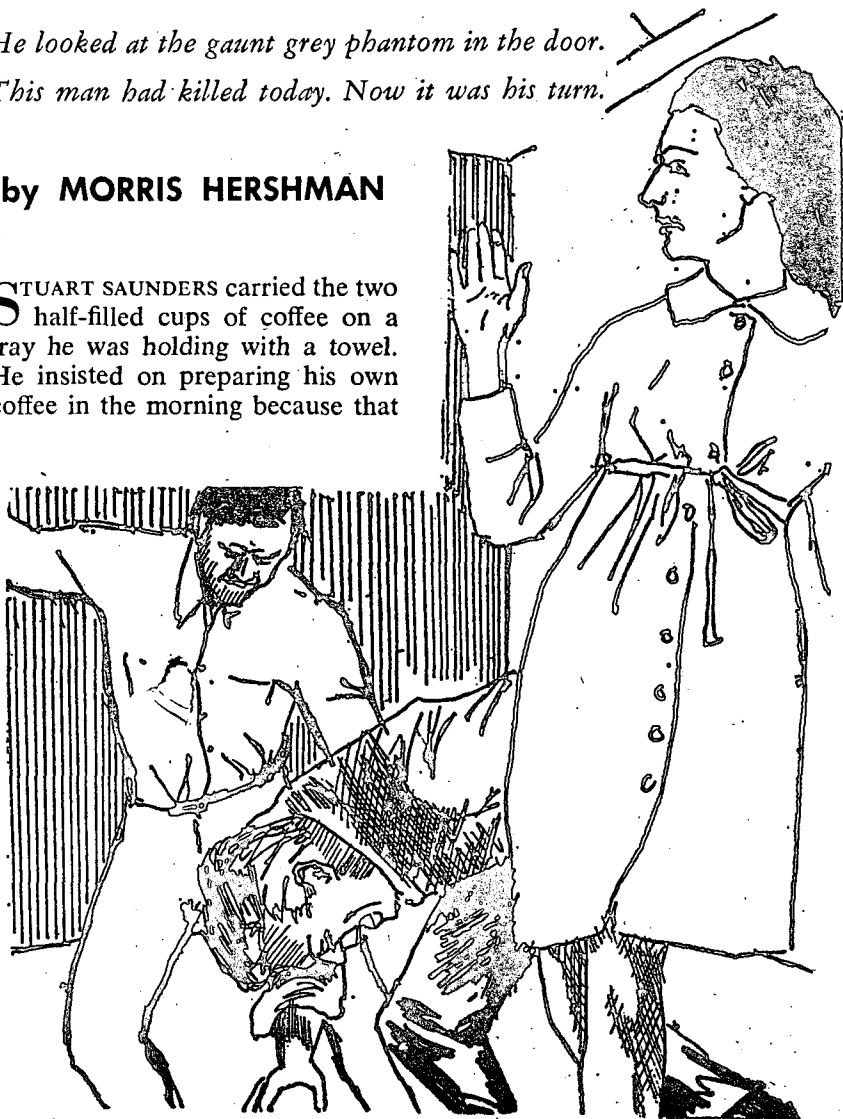
KILLER ONCE REMOVED

He looked at the gaunt grey phantom in the door.

This man had killed today. Now it was his turn.

by **MORRIS HERSHMAN**

STUART SAUNDERS carried the two half-filled cups of coffee on a tray he was holding with a towel. He insisted on preparing his own coffee in the morning because that



stuff his wife used to make for him tasted awful. Irma had flounced out of the kitchen a few seconds ago to answer the ringing doorbell.

When the coffee was on the table, Stuart Saunders made sure that the clock-radio said exactly eight before turning on the radio news.

"A convict has escaped from the State penitentiary," the announcer said. "Walter Moss, who was serving a life sentence for murder, shot and wounded a guard during the escape and is now believed to be in town."

Saunders was open-mouthed when his wife returned from the door. She looked grim. Back of her stood a man whose face was gray with tension. He carried a gun tautly in one thick heavy hand.

"Need some help," Walter Moss snapped. "I came here, Stu, because we used to be pals up until the time I quit high school, and you were always telling me not to take risks, but play things safe. It figures you'll play things safe again, or else I'll give you some trouble."

"Are you going to stay here?"

"That's it, Stu, with you and the—your wife, huh? Can't let her go, either."

Stuart cut in above Irma's startled protest. "How long will you be here?"

"Till the heat dies-down and I can go cross-country."

Irma said sharply, "I'm leaving as soon as I get my handbag."

Moss took a step toward her, and Stuart put himself between them. Moss automatically crashed the gun barrel down on the side of Stuart's head. Stuart fell back against the breakfront and dropped down to the floor.

"Sorry, Stu. I lost control for a minute," Moss said. "You didn't have that coming to you."

Carefully, making no extra moves, Stuart Saunders inched himself up on one of the chairs. He held his head in his hands afterwards and strained himself to hear exactly what Moss was doing. The visitor was in the kitchen listening to the radio newscast and pacing the room nervously.

Saunders walked into the kitchen.

"I gotta get out of here," Moss was saying as he walked up and down, nibbling at some of the cold chicken reserved for Saunders and not wincing noticeably at Irma's cooking. "I'll do you a favor sometime, Stu, in return for this."

The doorbell rang at half-past ten with a sound like a dentist's drill hitting a nerve. Stuart, who had been helping Irma with the dishes and trying in vain to point up the virtues of restaurant food, almost dropped a dish for the first time in his life. Moss pulled out his gun, a .357 Magnum, and kept his index finger taut on the trigger guard.

"Answer it, Stu," he said. "Open the door and stand a little away

from it, so I can see your face. I'll be right back of the door and you'll be getting the first bullet if there's trouble. Now move."

Stuart nodded and walked softly, as usual, on the squeaky wooden floor. He set an easy pace and held both hands in plain sight. Not till Moss had taken up a position at one side of the door did Stuart open it part way.

The man on the other side was in his fifties and bald except for a shaving-brush width of gray hair at the top of his head. He extended a leather wallet halfway open on a gleaming silver badge.

"My name's Keat and I'm a police lieutenant," he said. "Mind if I come in?"

"Don't!" Stuart exploded. Then he added more carefully, "That is, I'd rather you didn't."

"That's up to you, Mr. Saunders," the detective said slowly. "I just want to warn you to watch out for an old friend of yours named Walter Moss. He broke out of the State pen last night and he's dangerous. He may decide to look up one of his old pals."

"He's not here, that much I can tell you."

In the apartment, Irma sneezed violently.

"My wife," Stuart said. "Probably she just tasted something she cooked."

Keat smiled, then shrugged and turned away without another word. Stuart closed the door and locked

it, then leaned against it heavily before drawing a deep breath of relief. Irma was standing in front of the hallway with hands on her hips.

She said angrily, "You missed your chance, Stu. How could you be such a coward?"

Moss cut in roughly, "Forget that. Go into the living room and wait for me. Both of you."

Stuart led the way hurriedly inside, feeling Irma's angered look rake his back. Irma said, "That man could do anything, *anything*, and I'm sure you wouldn't lift a finger to stop him."

"He can't stay here forever," Stuart pointed out.

Irma's fingernails were beating a tattoo. "You'll get us killed, I just know it."

Moss flushed the toilet and a minute later he stepped into the room. He was glaring.

"We can't be sure that the cop's been sold a bill of goods," he growled. "The guy seemed suspicious. The best thing is for me to clear out."

Irma looked relieved. Stuart asked, "You're really going, Walt?"

"Yeah. I suppose you've got a car that I can use. Right?"

"Yes, two blocks away from here. I'll give you the keys."

"Hold on. I'll clue you on the setup. We're all going down to that car. You'll be in front, and me and your wife will be back of you. Nobody stays behind to phone the

cops. Got it? Do what I say, Stu, and you'll maybe keep on living. If you don't—"

Stuart walked slowly along the corridor, past the two lines of apartment doors. He kept the pace on his way down the stairs. His hands were in plain sight away from his body.

A woman wheeling a baby carriage nearly bumped into him when he got to the street. Stuart glanced back. Irma was with Moss. She was saying irritably:

"What are you trying to do? Can't you keep your balance?"

"Shut up," Moss said shortly. "I'm all right."

Stuart walked past a boy playing "slug" off the wall and saw Lieutenant Keat leaning against the window of the tailor shop. Keat had been relaxed till his eyes met Stuart's, but then the policeman became rigid and walked forward swiftly. There was a hand taut on his hip as he looked beyond Stuart Saunders and called out:

"You're covered, Moss."

Stuart instinctively ducked down back of the nearest parked car. He peered out in time to see Irma start running and make safety. Keat fired. Moss ran, weaving into the gutter with blind abandon. Cars roared back and forth on two sides of him. A car scraped past him and he lost his balance, touching hot tires, smooth sizzling headlights, knife-edged license plates.

A shifting array of horns bleated

as cars swerved to keep away from him. A heavy van couldn't make the turn soon enough. Walter Moss screamed horribly at impact. . .

"SOMETHING HAS come up," Lieutenant Keat said to Stuart and Irma.

—It was the same evening and they were back in their apartment. Stuart was grateful for the respite, for he had been facing what was left of the cold chicken that Moss hadn't swallowed, and Irma had been hurrying him to finish.

"Is anything wrong, Lieutenant?" Stuart asked.

"Well, a routine post-mortem was done on Moss' body as it is on anybody who meets a violent death, and we found something in his stomach that surprised us."

"What would that be?"

"Arsenic trioxide," Keat said. "Poison, in other words. Have you got any idea how it got there?"

Stuart Saunders understood promptly. He turned to his wife, who looked downward.

"The cold chicken," he said softly. "You had dosed it for me. You were going to poison *me*, weren't you?"

Irma said nothing. Stuart got up abruptly, telling himself that Moss had been right when he had said he'd do Stu a favor sometime in return for letting him use the apartment. Walter Moss had done the favor much sooner than he could have expected.

(Continued from other side)

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